

VOLUME TWENTY-THREE • NUMBER ONE • SPRING 2002

# HUMAN DEVELOPMENT

The Jesuit Educational  
Center for Human Development

**Intimacy and the Good Life**

**Intimacy Across Generations**

**Intimacy in Priests' Support Groups**

**Cross-Cultural Pastoral Intimacy**

**Impediments to Intimacy**

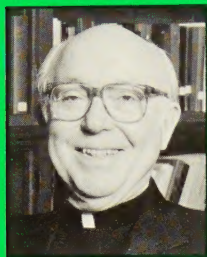
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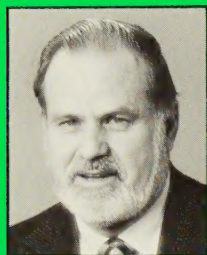




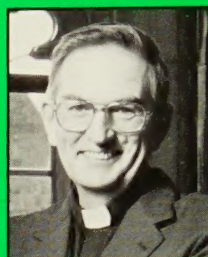
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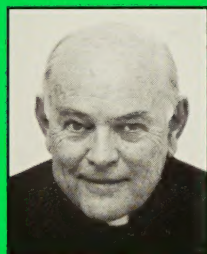
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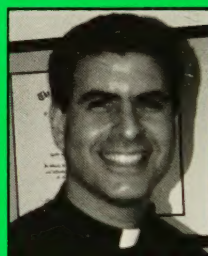
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Unaccepted mailed manuscripts will not be returned unless requested and submitted with a stamped, self-addressed return envelope.

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# EDITOR'S PAGE

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## A LONG LOOK AT INTIMACY

A glance at the titles of the articles in this issue will tell our readers that we have finally decided to do something we have deliberately avoided for twenty-two years. We have prepared an issue that has one principal theme: "priestly intimacy." In past years we have tried to diversify the content of every issue so as to appeal to as wide a spectrum of readers' interests as possible. People have suggested from time to time that we should publish single-theme issues, but we have hesitated until now. Why the change? Let me try to explain. The story is a little complicated.

The popular and controversial report on priests and seminarians written by Father Donald Cozzens, published in the year 2000 under the arresting title *The Changing Face of the Priesthood*, prompted an executive committee meeting of the National Federation of Priests Councils (NFPC) to designate as priority concerns in the priesthood today the issues of intimacy, generativity, and presbyterial support. The group strongly proposed that the Winter 2001 issue of *Touchstone*, the NFPC's widely read quarterly, should feature articles by priests on various aspects of these topics, and that their writings should be expanded and given further exposure in the Spring 2002 issue of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT.

Before agreeing to participate in this joint venture in publishing, our editorial staff took into consideration some of the obvious questions that needed to be answered. For example, is there much interest among our readership in the lives, ministry, development, and education of the clergy? Is there already too much in print about priests and their problems? Will nonordained religious men and women feel an off-putting sense of exclusion upon finding articles on clergy only? Will we have to present a series of other specially focused issues of HUMAN DEVELOPMENT so as

not to appear biased or discriminating? Would we find enthusiastic support among our subscribers and authors for initiating such a series?

While we were trying to come up with answers to these and other serious questions, it became increasingly clear to us that as a result of the immense amount of American media coverage of the sexual misbehavior of priests in the Boston area and other parts of the country, countless lay members of the church are disillusioned with, resentful of, and unsympathetic to the hierarchy and priests. The morale of priests in many dioceses has reached an all-time low. Moreover, women religious are distancing themselves from priests even more than in recent decades. What problems might we create for ourselves by throwing so much of our editorial weight into exploring the lives, needs, and travails common today among members of the Catholic clergy?

Then came a moment of truth for us—one that helped us decide to go ahead with this collaboration with the NFPC. The reasoning is simple: If priests are going to survive these turbulent times and continue steadily and effectively to perform their ministry, they need—perhaps more than ever before—to feel that they have the appreciation and prayerful support of the laity, nonordained religious, and their fellow priests. My hope is that by reflecting on the articles included here, our readers will develop a deeper understanding of what priests are currently experiencing and what they need from church authorities, the faithful they serve, and those with whom they cooperate in ministry.

In the fall of this year, the Liturgical Press at Saint John's Abbey in Minnesota will be publishing Dean R. Hoge's research into *The First Five Years of Priesthood*, a collaborative work of the NFPC and the Life Cycle Institute of the Catholic University of America. The book will report and discuss a pilot survey of two groups—recently ordained priests in active service and men who have already resigned. The articles we are placing before you in this issue



will, aside from illuminating the current diocesan priesthood scene, also give readers a strong indication of what is happening to the young women and men who in recent years have entered houses of religious formation and committed themselves by vows to the state of religious life.

Finally, as a matter of some urgency, we have decided to include in this special issue a timely article written especially for us by Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D., a frequent contributor to these pages. His topic is "A

Psychological and Pastoral Response to Terrorism." We hope you will find this article of interest to you, and its recommendations useful in the course of your ministry.



James J. Gill, S.J., M.D.  
Editor-in-Chief

**The Catholic Church is now aware that men and women working as formation personnel in seminaries and religious communities need special preparation to understand and provide effective counseling in relation to sexuality.**

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# Male Intimacy

*Kevin P. McClone, M.Div., Psy.D.*

*The deepest need of man, then, is the need to overcome his separateness, to leave the prison of his aloneness.*  
(Erich Fromm, *The Art of Loving*, 1956)

**T**he above words of Erich Fromm, the eminent German psychoanalyst, poignantly point out the longing of the human heart for connection. Despite the yearning for deeper connection, real intimacy often eludes many men. In fact, some have argued that instead of searching for deeper bonds, many men do everything they can to avoid becoming intimate. In my work with men as a psychologist, chaplain, and addictions counselor, I have come to believe that men do long for deeper connections. The problem of male intimacy seems to be less one of desire than it is one of mastery. Many men come to therapy realizing that relationships are important for them and sincerely wanting to make things better. However, these same men often feel lost as to just how to enhance their relational lives.

When performing a task that requires clear goals and objectives, men feel on familiar ground, but intimacy—the kind that challenges us to reveal our inmost selves to another—is scary and uncharted territory. How will we as men navigate this terrain? Carol Gilligan, the Harvard University professor and pioneer in women's development, notes in her book *In a Different Voice* that the world of intimacy, which

appears so mysterious and dangerous to men, is more coherent and safe for women. Whereas women are socialized to value and nurture connectedness, men long for deeper relationships but are often unsure as to how to foster intimate connections.

The purpose of this article is threefold: to explore the concept of intimacy and the unique ways in which men connect, to highlight some major barriers men face in making more intimate connections, and to suggest ways to overcome these obstacles and deepen existing relationships.

## INTIMACY DEFINED

Just what do we mean when we speak of intimacy? According to Erik Erikson, author of the classic work *Childhood and Society*, intimacy involves both relationship commitments and the ethical strength to abide by those commitments. It involves the sharing of one's inner self in detail and depth. Intimacy is the capacity to commit oneself to particular individuals in relationships that last over time, even though those relationships may call for significant sacrifice and compromise. Intimacy also involves strengths of character that support such commitments. It involves being able simultaneously to maintain one's personal integrity and to meet the accompanying demands



for change. Intimacy is a challenge to deeper personal growth. It calls us to our fears, such as the fear of ego loss, and gives us opportunities to confront those obstacles that keep us from opening up to love.

Pat Collins, an Irish Vincentian priest who has lectured extensively on spirituality, explores intimacy in his book *Intimacy and the Hungers of the Human Heart*. Collins aptly notes that intimacy can also be explored by examining what it is not. Intimacy is not the same as infatuation or the experience of falling in love. We may feel very close, but adult intimacy is possible only when our sense of self is enhanced, rather than lost, in a relationship. Most of us fall in love with an ideal—a projected image of what we imagine marriage or religious life to be. When we encounter the reality, a necessary period of disillusionment begins. If mature intimacy develops, these false or more idealized images must give way to a deeper and more authentic relationship. Collins notes that the essence of intimacy, according to American psychiatrists Tom and Pat Malone, is “feeling closer to myself while I am in relationship to something other than me.” Intimacy allows you to be you and me to be me. Intimacy is neither suffocating nor disinterested but is rooted in mutuality and equality in the relationship.

## HOW MEN CONNECT

While I like the descriptions of intimacy offered by Erikson and others, I realize that for most men, intimacy remains a distant dream. Many avoid intimacy altogether or seek it in less than healthy ways. According to one research study cited by Collins, when the nature of intimacy as self-disclosure was explained to a group of men, 87 percent had to admit that they never experienced such intimacy with anyone, male or female. Why is it so hard for men to make deeper connections with others?

The forming of an intimate friendship is a rare experience for many men. Yale psychiatry professor Daniel Levinson, in his classic ten-year study of men's development, *The Seasons of a Man's Life*, notes that most men have not had an intimate nonsexual relationship with a woman. For men, intimacy with women is more often viewed in sexual terms, with sex being the supreme intimacy. At best, men are friendly rather than intimate in their relationships, especially with one another. Men connect much more through activity and specific roles that seem to be socially sanctioned or prescribed. In his book *The Intimate Connection*, James Nelson explores male intimacy and sexuality and states that the nature of men's friendships is to be rooted in particular roles and tasks (e.g., my golf friend, my work friend). It seems

much easier for men to share activities such as sports rather than their inner selves.

When men talk, they tend to use fewer words and often feel awkward expressing verbal affection. I can recall my own father struggling to explain to me what he was taught about men expressing feelings and genuine affection: “It just wasn't done back then. Guys just didn't talk about their feelings.” It seems that in this modern era, men receive mixed messages about what a man should be. There is a call to be more sensitive and nurturing, yet to still be strong and powerful, and many men feel confused and conflicted about how to maneuver these ambiguities. In her book *A Study of Male Sexuality*, Shere Hite reports that almost none of the 7,239 men she surveyed said they were close or had been close to their fathers.

Men and women differ in their expressions of intimacy. Carol Rhodes and Norman Goldner, in *Why Women and Men Don't Get Along*, indicate that women are better at talking about feelings and relationships, their inner world, whereas men are more focused on sharing about sports and politics, their outer world. They note that women usually have an expressive loving style that includes affection, emotion, tenderness, talkativeness, and empathy. Men have a more instrumental style, based on providing practical help, sharing physical activities, spending time together, providing security, being responsible for a partner's well-being, and providing material things.

William Pollack, a clinical psychologist at Harvard Medical School and author of *Real Boys*, highlights how boys play more physical games, are less verbal, more competitive, and connect through doing rather than being. His two decades of research reveals that many boys feel lonely, sad, and confused, but rather than being allowed to express these feelings, they are instead encouraged to appear tough, cheerful, and confident. In his research, Pollack sharply challenges the conventional expectations about manhood that encourage parents to treat boys as little men, raising them in a toughening process that drives their true emotions underground.

## BARRIERS TO MALE INTIMACY

The price that we as men have paid for neglecting our relationships has been tremendous. The failure to look within and deepen our capacity for intimate connections has led to increased isolation, loneliness, and stress. In our effort to escape the discomfort and pain of our emotional world, many men have been drawn away from their true selves and into compulsive and addictive lifestyles. Unhealthy behaviors such as alcohol and drug abuse, worka-



holism, sexual addictions, and compulsions have often been used to fill the void. Many of us have looked for love in all the wrong places and found ourselves wanting still. Our society continues to be plagued by domestic abuse and violence against women. Promiscuity and pornography, especially via the Internet, are on the rise. For these reasons and many more, it is crucial that we explore the barriers to genuine intimacy for men.

**Lack of Trust.** One major barrier to intimacy for us men is a fear of trusting one another with our real selves. I have spoken with many men who can identify with feeling lonely and disconnected. Yet many of these same men acknowledge that it is hard to trust. Change is difficult, and habitual patterns of relating are not easy to change. To acknowledge feelings of anxiety, fear, loneliness, and sadness may feel threatening. The building of trust takes time and a willingness to risk. Some men are genuinely not consciously aware of their feelings, and others guard them closely. Some may isolate themselves from others or surround themselves with a variety of superficial relationships; no one knows them well.

Growth in our relational lives challenges us to face our fears, confront our defensiveness, and grieve our losses. The road to becoming more real is both wondrous and painful at times. To be more intimate in our relating sounds nice, but real integrity often brings us into conflict with others. If I tell others who I am, will they turn away? Will they accept me? Will they honor my confidence in them? Will I be accepted or made to feel shame? Will I lose some of my masculine sense of independence, control, or authority?

## LACK OF SELF-ESTEEM

It is not difficult to see the critical importance of self-esteem in developing greater intimacy. If we do not see ourselves as lovable and worthwhile human beings, we will seek sources and people outside of us to fill that void, and we will always be left wanting. No one can supply what we lack. If we are alienated from ourselves, we will lack the capacity for mature and responsible loving. In other words, there needs to be a me to both love you and to be loved by you. I can't give what I don't have, or receive what I don't believe myself worthy of having.

Many of us, as men, are out of touch with our deepest selves and find the emotional world threatening. To grow in self-awareness and self-esteem means to gain an appreciation of emotional needs. Unfortunately, many men have developed their in-

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## Many men have developed their intellectual and cognitive capacities to the detriment of their emotional lives

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tellectual and cognitive capacities to the detriment of their emotional lives. Daniel Goleman describes this so well in his book on *Emotional Intelligence*, which points out that the head has been given primacy over the heart in our understanding of what is the measure of a successful man. This lack of confidence in the realm of our emotional lives hinders many men's self-esteem.

**Lack of Empathy.** All rapport building, so crucial to intimacy, comes from our capacity for empathy. Empathy builds on emotional self-awareness. The more aware we men are of our feelings, the more likely we will be able to appreciate the feelings of others. Empathy is a relational skill that is either neglected or nourished, depending on how it is modeled for us by parents and other caregivers. Unfortunately, many men—particularly those who have been emotionally abused—lack this critical relational skill.

**Barriers in Communication with Women.** Men often fail in emotional intimacy with women because they fail to really listen. We often miss the cues. When women approach men with emotional issues, men often connect by trying to solve their problems rather than just listening and offering empathic support, which is most often what women want. A woman wants us to hear and truly listen without judging, analyzing, evaluating, or problem solving. Men, on the other hand, genuinely feel that problem solving is helpful. After all, that is the way most men have been socialized to approach things. So a man may end up feeling unappreciated, and the woman is left feeling misunderstood. The conflict



remains unresolved. Author John Gray notes that under stress, men need space, and women need to talk. The woman may often draw closer to the man to work out the conflict, and the man, sensing only an escalation of the conflict, often either shuts down, sulks, or walks away.

**Relationships with Men and Homophobia.** Men often view the open expression of emotion as a more feminine quality and, as a result, develop a limited ability to both recognize and express their emotions. This greatly obstructs our human need for intimacy. Many men were socialized to prove and defend their masculinity. For some men, becoming affectionate with other men triggers a homophobic response that they may find uncomfortable or frightening. For others, the feeling is that if they are not macho or are too affectionate, they might be viewed as gay. A similar phenomenon occurs in the area of touch, which is also seen as feminine. As a result, men experience a limited range of tactile expressions of emotion. For men, touch is usually sanctioned only in certain prescribed situations and in certain ways (e.g., a pat on the back, a handshake, or a high-five following a sporting victory).

**Men and Grief.** Men have a tough time grieving openly. We fear embracing emotional pain and often feel awkward when there are no answers, or when the answer is simply to be present and not to do anything. For years we have been trained to handle our emotions, to take charge, to be in control, to solve problems. Then a significant loss or death hits us, and we are confused and bewildered by our conflicting emotions. I recall working as a hospice chaplain and witnessing a man failing to acknowledge his wife's laments and feelings as she was dying because he didn't want to feel the pain. Tragically, this avoidance of his real feelings blocked him from being more fully present to his wife in her final hours.

The movie *Shadowlands* powerfully portrays the story of C. S. Lewis's grief experience when facing his wife's bout with cancer. This deeply spiritual man, who had written eloquently about the love of God, discovered true intimacy only after his own journey through pain and grief. Pain, as exemplified by Lewis, gives birth to passion and compassion. It was only when he surrendered to his deep feelings of grief that his intimacy was able to come to full bloom.

**Developmental Barriers to Intimacy.** An individual man can fail to mature in intimacy because he is stuck in an earlier stage of development. Many men have unresolved issues with authority or have failed

to establish their own sound self-identity. Whether in a marriage or as a priest or religious brother, the person is left incapable of mature love because of his own unfinished developmental work at an earlier stage. This may be manifested in marriage or religious life as recurring problems with authority, commitment, and the ability to trust and work effectively with others. Whatever the recurring problem is, there are unmet needs of an earlier stage of development that remain unfinished. What has not been worked through gets reenacted in the present relationship, family, or religious community. This is what Freud called repetition compulsion.

Some common obstacles to greater intimacy for men exist in family-of-origin issues. For example, many boys who grow up in alcoholic homes learn that it is not okay to express how you feel. Having to be on guard against the unpredictable behavior of the alcoholic parent, they learn to not trust their feelings. A similar dynamic happens with men who have experienced significant emotional, physical, or sexual abuse. If not worked through in therapy, these issues can be major barriers to developing the necessary skills and commitment needed for mature adult intimacy. Many men who struggle with intimacy issues today have unresolved issues with one or another parent that get reenacted in the present. This may come in the form of the "father wound" for many men who have failed to integrate their conflicting feelings toward their father into their lives. For other men, an issue may also be a failure to fully separate from their mother.

**Perfectionism as a Barrier.** Our models of perfection hinder male intimacy. Even today, in the midst of an argument with my wife, I feel like less of a man when I am called to honestly admit I was wrong. While my rational mind says that apologizing is no sign of weakness, I still feel as if I've been defeated. Being raised in a male world of winners and losers, vulnerability often feels quite unsettling, and at times a part of me would rather run than face the truth. The truth is often hidden under a wall of false pride and an ego that needs massaging. Deep in the male psyche is the need to be validated and affirmed. I have appreciated other men who have shared how they have grown to accept their limitations without shame. Real male mentors model strength while embracing vulnerability. Maturing in intimacy draws us deeper into the reality of our own imperfections.

**Defenses as Barriers to Intimacy.** One of the ways we deceive ourselves is through psychological defenses. We all use defenses every day of our lives. In



many ways these defenses can be quite useful and adaptive for us at times. They provide a natural way to manage stress and preserve the psyche in times of crisis. However, these same defenses can easily become maladaptive, especially when used consistently as a way to deny or distort reality and avoid facing the honest truth about ourselves. When personality dynamics consistently lead to relational problems, an underlying personality disorder may be operating, and professional help may be necessary. However, whether through blaming others, isolating ourselves, or denying our feelings, we all can mask the truth. When we deny and distort, we move farther from our deepest self and, consequently, farther from others and God.

**Self-Deception.** A central defense and a key barrier to intimacy for men is our own capacity for self-deception. We deceive ourselves when we as men allow fear and false pride to keep us from drawing closer to others in relationship. Self-deception involves denying our emotional world and convincing ourselves we don't need to ask for help or acknowledge our limitations. To be intimate with self, God, and others is to face our true selves. Thomas Merton said that there was no spiritual life divorced from reality. I would add that there is no true intimacy divorced from reality. It calls us to do an honest self-appraisal—to look into the mirror and see how we allow fear, ego, dishonesty, pride, resentment, and lust to cloud our vision.

**Lack of Solitude as a Barrier to Intimacy.** Noise, distractions, busyness, and activity of all sorts threaten to keep us from experiencing our deepest center. We as men often run from our fears, resentments, sadness, and worry rather than take them to quiet times and allow for God's transforming power to intervene. As Joan Timmerman has noted, while true intimacy demands work and honest self-awareness, it is also a fruit of the Spirit. To be in touch with that Spirit demands some commitment to prayer and solitude. Intimacy is a grace and a gift. In prayer we bring our whole selves—body, mind, and heart—asking for the courage to grow in honest self-awareness and to remove those obstacles and defects of character that inhibit our growth.

## **PATHWAYS TO GREATER INTIMACY**

**Midlife Challenge.** Just as some men fail to grow in intimacy because they are “stuck” at an earlier life stage, some have developmental opportunities when they are more receptive to change. Such is the case at midlife, when men tend to be more open to

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**When sexuality is divorced from its intimate connection with spirituality, we as men and women suffer**

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exploring the longing of the heart and nurturing their relational lives. Many men have shared with me that as they have reached midlife, issues of intimacy and relationships have become more important. Martin Pable highlights this developmental window in his book *The Quest for the Male Soul*. He notes that before age 40, men are too busy “conquering” in the workplace, the bedroom, the sports field, and elsewhere to acknowledge that they are hurting in any way.

It seems that when we as men have grown old enough to recognize periods of genuine limitation (such as the death of a parent) and to realize that the “dream” of career or a particular ministry may not have been all it was cut out to be, we are still left feeling that something is missing. Levinson confirms that in the midlife transition, a man is more able to look within and deal with illusions about himself. In a marriage, if there are problems, the man may now look within for his responsibility in the marital tensions. In religious life, men may be more concerned about how they can foster closer friendships in their community.

**Reclaiming Sexuality in Its Fullness.** I have counseled many men who had active sex lives yet had not a clue as to what genuine intimacy was all about. The overemphasis on sexuality as synonymous with genital sex has distorted for men the fullness of what it means to be sexual beings. When sexuality is divorced from its intimate connection with spirituality, we as men and women suffer. We need to reclaim sexuality in its fullness—not the narrow version that Madison Avenue and *Playboy* have tried to sell us, but a sexuality rooted in a creative loving that sees our con-



nections to all of life. For years sexuality was seen as “dirty” precisely because it was too narrowly identified with genitalia. It is time to embrace the awe and wonder of sexuality as a creative gift of God to be cherished. Only then will we as men find the courage to feel our feelings, face our fears, share our tears, and risk being more vulnerable in relationships.

This sexuality calls us to a love that nourishes and gives life to all our relationships. As men we are most fully passionate and intimate when nourishing our bodies, minds, and spirits rather than just our minds. Many of us are disconnected from our bodies. Consequently, many of our denied or repressed feelings end up being stored in our physical bodies. We as men will grow in intimacy when we are able to restore a sense of wholeness, harmony, and balance to our lives.

**Embrace Mortality.** My ten years as a hospice chaplain were a gift that taught me many life lessons. Life is fragile and precious. When people realize their limitations, the important things in life rise to the surface: relationships, family, friends. There is little time to play games and not be real. Life is to be savored. These same lessons can help mark the path to greater male intimacy by challenging us to live more fully and consciously in the now. To live in the present demands a willingness to commit to investing in the significant relationships of our lives, whether as religious, priest, or married, and allowing intimacy to grow. We as men are challenged to embrace our mortality. When I am aware of my limitations, I’m closer to facing the truth of myself and asking for help in relationships.

A major barrier for us as men is needing to be in control. But love and intimacy call us to let go, to risk, to trust, and to reach out without fear. Our acceptance of our own powerlessness and limitations can be a liberating message, since we have lived in a world of expectations and competition where we may have never felt good enough. Embracing these wounds will free us to love more deeply. Ernest Kurtz and Katherine Ketchum, in their book *The Spirituality of Imperfection*, beautifully capture how God’s love comes through our weakness:

Imperfection is rather the crack in the armor, the “wound” that lets “God” in. As Meister Eckhart wrote almost seven hundred years ago: “To get at the core of God at his greatest, one must first get into the core of himself at his least.”

Instead of viewing our wounds as barriers, we can see our embracings of vulnerability as the wounds that let God in and let intimacy begin to flower.

**The Path of Surrender and Emptiness.** Ray Grigg, in his book *The Tao of Relationships*, utilizes the ancient Chinese wisdom in Lao Tzu’s *Tao Te Ching* to remind us that intimacy in relationship is less about grasping and more about emptying oneself:

Fullness cannot receive so begin by emptying. There cannot be full growth without full room. To grow and fill, continue to empty so there can always be receiving.

Many men go to their graves never having been really known. This is tragic. There are people who can help teach us how to be more real and vulnerable, but our pride keeps us from learning. My wife has taught me a great deal about intimacy in her willingness to risk being honest and genuine in her relationship with me. Often I didn’t value her honesty because of my own false pride and failure to empty myself to receive. A true friend or mentor can be a source of wisdom if we are able to empty ourselves and be open to receiving. For some, seeking professional counseling may be helpful in unlocking old wounds or uncovering deeper obstacles to intimacy and destructive patterns of relating.

**Restoring a Sense of Balance and Passion for Life.** Capuchin psychologist Martin Pable notes that being a mature male means living a life that is in balance. Mature and intimate men have lives that reflect a rhythm of work, rest, labor, and leisure. When a man has a network of supportive relationships, gets physical exercise, nourishes his mind and spirit with reading and prayer, and takes time for friends and cultural interests, his capacity for intimacy grows.

When we as men are growing in intimacy, we are also growing in greater harmony with all of life. There is a reverence for ourselves, others, and God that respects our fundamental interconnectedness with all creation. For us men, the challenge will be to embrace our emotional world and grow more sensitive to our bodies, feelings, and senses. Intimacy grows when there is a balance or harmony of the head, body, and heart.

Intimacy for men challenges us to reclaim the passion we once felt as children—that passion for life that allowed spontaneity and love to flourish. To do so will challenge us to take the risks that lead to deeper connections. Embracing our passionate selves will challenge us to let go of self-consciousness and be free to risk sharing more deeply. The best masculine qualities of authority, strength, and decisiveness can be embraced—not as power over and against others, but rather as power in service of others, and in service of the call to intimate and creative loving.



**Path of Honest Self-Appraisal.** Just as self-deception is a key barrier that can keep us as men from growing in our call to love, the pathway to healing comes through honest self-disclosure. When I am honest with myself, I have begun to water the seeds of intimacy. As a man, I find it hard to admit that I'm sorry, that I've made a mistake, or that I have hurt those that I profess to love. Healing comes through facing ourselves honestly, and the grace to change follows that willingness. Intimacy is about being real and taking off the masks and personas that keep ourselves and others at a distance. Intimacy with others presupposes a level of intimacy and self-knowledge that provides the atmosphere for more authentic sharing of self. If I am not in touch with my thoughts, feelings, emotions, and behaviors, how am I to reveal my true self?

**Intimacy as a Commitment to Growth.** Intimacy, in its fullest expression, involves a commitment to growth in relationship, whether one is single, married, or celibate. The commitment begins with one-self. It is a commitment to grow in self-awareness and self-acceptance. We discover that self not in isolation but in and through relationships that we commit to nurturing through time and mutual sharing. This commitment to growth will challenge us men to expand our comfort zone and be willing to face the inevitable conflicts inherent in a growing relationship. Our commitment to growth will call us men to embrace a healthy sense of self-sacrifice and discipline essential for deepening our intimate relationships.

The well-known serenity prayer calls us to have the courage to change the things we can. The beginning of change starts when we recognize our need for help. To grow in intimacy challenges us to recognize the ways in which the culture and society have presented us with false images of true manhood and to reclaim our God-given capacities for openness, compassion, and intimate connection. A new vision of what real men are all about is essential. Real men are vulnerable, able to ask for help, able to feel their feelings and express them tenderly without shame. Real men are there for their children, wives, friends, and

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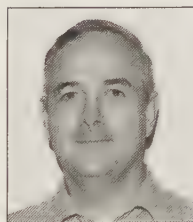
**Intimacy, in its fullest expression, involves a commitment to growth in relationship, whether one is single, married, or celibate**

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religious communities and are committed to the discipline inherent in mature and creative loving, which is at the heart of our vocation as men of faith.

#### RECOMMENDED READING

- Collins, P. *Intimacy and the Hungers of the Human Heart*. Dublin, Ireland: Columbia, 1991.
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# Intimacy Across Generations

*Very Reverend Gerald L. Brown, S.S., Ph.D.*

**T**here is a time for everything. In God's grace, now is the perfect time for me to reflect on intimacy in my life and, in a focused way, to concentrate on relationships with brother priests, especially from the perspective of cross-generational experience. Where do I know intimacy most profoundly? With whom? Why? What has worked for me over the years?

Writing on this topic at this time has allowed me to make more explicit to myself my own experience of intimacy and has enabled me to share with potential readers at least one person's journey through the stages of life in dialogue with the lives of others. It is for this reason that I have chosen, in this article, to use the method of self-disclosure and personal self-reflection, and it is my hope that all of us in priestly ministry will do the same. Harvard psychologist and author Robert Coles has an enlightening quote about the need to share one's life in a meaningfully disclosive way: "The sine qua non of storytelling is human mutuality, human connection and the wish for that. When people lose that, they lose themselves." It is my hope that in the process of conversation with others seeking self-knowledge and authentic communication, we will all grow in wisdom and grace and, in the process, more profoundly find ourselves.

First of all, I have good news to share about my earliest experiences of intimacy. Despite problems of

alcoholism in the life of my father and occasions of severe financial crisis for my family, I have always felt loved to the core. Though I have experienced periods of insecurity and anxiety, I have never had radical doubts about my self-worth and know that I am lovable and capable of loving others. I can take no credit for what comes from a family, primary and extended, that demonstrates love with no strings attached. In this, I am painfully aware that many seminarians and priests have not been so blessed.

I also have been gifted over the years with close friends. From my earliest days as a child in San Francisco neighborhoods, through my seminary experience, and throughout my last thirty-seven years as a priest, friends have played an integral and integrating role in my life. Moreover, they have been richly diverse—male and female, single, married, with and without children, committed to religious life, ordained and nonordained, my age, younger and older than me, Anglo, Asian, Hispanic, and black. Of course, at any one time in life, we have enough energy and time to maintain only a few extremely close friendships. Nevertheless, there is a beautiful quality to life when we can look back and claim a wide diversity of nurturing relationships that cut across the various dimensions of our personal, professional, recreational, and spiritual lives. Again, I realize, from



years of conversation with others, that not all seminarians and priests have had the same experience.

Inevitably in friendships, misunderstandings and misinterpretations occur that require patience, tolerance, and heavy doses of forgiveness. Sometimes friends fall in love with each other despite commitments and promises already made, whether to the married state or to a celibate way of life. Experiencing intimacy in life always demands a certain amount of risk and then the courage to face reality and to make healthy decisions if caught in a zone of danger. There is also the pain of regret when geographic changes make certain friendships no longer viable. One always needs to deal with loss and separation, including the ultimate loss, the death of a close friend. All of these realities I have experienced, generally with pain and some confusion.

One stabilizing feature for me, in the midst of comings and goings, has been the presence in my life for thirty-seven years of my brothers in the Society of Saint Sulpice. All of us are united by a common mission. Although we are not all intimate friends with each other, we are all concerned to some degree about each other's well-being. In this context, I have been blessed—from the day of my first assignment in Seattle to my ministry here in San Antonio—to have as extremely close friends at least a few of my Sulpician brothers. Of course, the fact that some of these friends are now at a distance requires planning to get together from time to time, regular phone calls, prayer for each other, and acts of generosity symbolizing our love and regard. Maintaining friendships takes commitment, fidelity, and hard work.

## CENTRALITY OF INTIMACY

It should be no surprise that in my ministry of seminary and continuing formation for more than 37 years, the topic of intimacy has been a regular companion—in spiritual direction, in talks as rector or provincial, in homilies, and in informal conversation with seminarians, colleagues, priests on retreat, friends, and others. Together we have covered the whole gamut of human relationships, exploring such topics as self-regard and self-love, family history, one's history of friendship with others, times of intimacy, experience of one's sexuality, and sexual feelings toward self and others. We have dealt with loneliness, methods for sustaining oneself in priesthood, the need for healthy relationships, techniques of conflict resolution, ways of keeping alive personally and spiritually, and intimacy with God.

In the process of assisting others, of course, there is always the need to keep honest ourselves and to keep check on our own needs for intimacy and bal-

ance in life. There come times when we need to go beyond helping others to deal with intimacy in their lives and allow ourselves, often with the help of others, to focus on the quality of intimacy in our own. For me, providentially, this is one of those times.

Reflecting on this topic at this moment is a grace for me. This is true for many reasons. I am now 63 years old, and while I continue to lead an extremely active life of leadership, I do it with less physical strength and with weaker health than years ago, and thus I need more support than I did as a youth. I find that I am much more vulnerable physically than just a few years ago—in fact, more so than most people my age. Such is the luck of the genetic draw. This in turn requires an acceptance of fragility and the reality of the unknown. It also requires that I build in time for at least a few relationships of quality that give and sustain life.

Moreover, as the reader might have deduced earlier, I am geographically distant from family members who have helped to shape my own positive experience of intimacy, from youth until now, and far from most of my dearest friends in other parts of the country—clerical, religious, and lay (which helps to explain large phone bills). This makes me much more keenly aware of my desire to be loved for who I am and my need for the quality time and space to reciprocate.

I am also living at a time of great social unease and alienation in society and conflict in our world, and I need to preserve and nurture my inner self so that I might be a loving presence to others even more vulnerable than I. At times like these, we all sense our need for family support, for deeper and more constant prayer, and for sacred time with friends who matter to us.

All of this demands a life of intimacy. If we are to be joyful ministers with the inner resources to encourage others, we ourselves need friends and colleagues, male and female, with whom we can share openly and freely our own questions, doubts, hurts, and dreams. And this sharing needs to cut across all the dimensions of our lives—physical, emotional, relational, and spiritual. I am blessed here in San Antonio to maintain, from a distance, a few friendships of genuine quality and, at the same time, to relate on a deeply intimate level of sharing with friends who are nearby. The more I reflect on this topic, the more I see that this has been true in every phase of my life, not only during this period of greater vulnerability.

## SUSTAINING RELATIONSHIPS CRUCIAL

Intimacy needs to be nurtured throughout one's priestly life, from the early days of learning and



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## Throughout my life, friendships with priests in other age groups have helped me to keep in touch with God's action in every heart and in all stages of life

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experimentation, through the middle years of fine-tuning our vision and perfecting our capacity for leadership, to a time in later life when we can rely on a well-honed wisdom to live authentically and assist others in achieving balance and integrity in life. In a special way, if we are to grow as priests, individually and as members of a presbyterate, we need to guarantee for ourselves healthy and sustaining relationships with brother priests. These days, I find that this growth process is greatly enhanced when all generations of priests assist each other through the necessary challenges and transactions of each stage of life.

I find myself blessed these days to work in the seminary system with colleagues who span several decades in age—men and women from a variety of community traditions in the church. From each person I can learn something of God's presence and marvel at God's work. Our seminarians also represent a diversity of age groups. The older learn from the enthusiasm of the young, and the younger learn from the experience of those more seasoned. All of us talk about issues of great concern in our lives, such as our capacity for spiritual leadership in today's complicated world, ways of living a celibate life with joy and fruitfulness, and ways of developing support systems that will bring vitality to each phase of life—systems like spiritual direction with a trusted mentor; support groups with brother priests; prayer groups in the parish with men and women of diverse ages, experiences, and cultures; days off for re-creating with others the human spirit and nurturing the soul; and

methods of prayer that match our personalities and particular call from God.

It is fascinating to me, in my ministry of priestly formation, not only to witness but also to experience personally the common and necessary transition from midlife to the dominant generation, when individuals are expected to assume the mantle of leadership, authority, and responsibility. How we pass from one stage to the next, in this case, affects the fate of the church and of broader society. And now, as I exercise leadership at this stage in my life, I can look to the final stages of life, when we must descend from the seat of power to assume the position of loyal advisor or mentor and thus make a profound difference in the quality of future leadership and direction. Indeed, older generations must be about the task of leaving a legacy that empowers those moving into new positions of authority and power.

### GROUP SUPPORT

For all these reasons, it has been a special blessing for me to belong to a Jesu Caritas group here in San Antonio. We are seven members, ranging in age from our mid-thirties to late sixties and early seventies. All except me, a seminary rector, and one of the auxiliary bishops of the archdiocese are pastors of active, dynamic parishes. Some are recently ordained; others have been priests for many years. We look forward to our monthly meetings and regret deeply those times when unavoidable pastoral obligations stand in the way of attendance. We share intimately what is going on in our ministries and in our own personal spiritual lives. We listen to each other with genuine respect and love and share honestly and compassionately out of our own experience and wisdom in order to help the other reflect more deeply on his life and find ways of drawing closer to the Lord and finding true happiness in ministry. We encourage each other to develop and maintain life-giving friendships at the one-to-one level with lay, religious, or ordained men and women and to limit relationships that rob us of life and unnecessarily drain our energy.

It was a gift from God that, almost as soon as I arrived in San Antonio, I was invited to join this group. Very quickly, men who started out as strangers became soul friends, and these new friends have helped me to take the time I need to maintain spiritual balance in the midst of a hectic ministry, to maintain close relationships with men and women who have supported me over the years, and to make new friendships in this new home of mine.

The fact that our group represents several age groups is in itself a blessing. Generation Xers share



intense spiritual and theological convictions born of the need for clarity and certainty. Theirs is an apostolic spirit dedicated to conversion of heart and action. Baby boomers share an innate enthusiasm for change and renewal made possible by the mighty power of the Holy Spirit, as well as their openness to diversity in the church and tolerance for ambiguity. Older generations inspire us with patience and a mature sense of humor in the face of life's struggles and inconsistencies.

## CROSS-GENERATIONAL FRIENDSHIPS

Throughout my life, I have found that friendships with priests in other age groups have helped me to keep in touch with God's action in every heart and in all stages of life. As a young priest in Seattle, I had friends much older than I, and their sense of dynamism in the face of personal decline, their hope in the face of death, their ability to face the unknown with courage, their patience, and their perseverance gave me hope and heart for the future. When older priests are not afraid to die, younger men will not be afraid to live. Now I hope that I am able to do the same for those coming after me.

At this stage of life, when I can no longer play active sports such as soccer or racquetball, and when I need more sleep to maintain energy and inner strength, I enjoy the spontaneity of those younger than me and live vicariously, through them, the eternal youth that is God.

It has also been a strength to pray with others from different age groups—and, in a special way here in San Antonio, across cultures, for each culture has its own appreciation of the stages of life. It can be humbling to experience the reverence of many Asians for the priest in my age category, but this helps me to identify with those who have gone before us and to appreciate the respect for wisdom that we all need to cultivate in our lives. Within our culture, it is also humbling to realize that many youths today can write off the experience of those much older. This helps me to be sensitive to prejudices of all kinds that fail to see the worth of the other and to celebrate the differences among us. It also requires that I reach out in appropriate friendship to those much younger than I.

I would like to comment on an issue of growing concern among many candidates to priesthood: Will they find friends among their fellow priests once ordained, especially in dioceses that have very few or hardly any yearly ordinations? These days, we emphasize in seminaries the need for mutual support among priests, but many seminarians have heard tragic stories of isolation and loneliness rather than tales of camaraderie and life-giving friendship. Will

they be able to survive once ordained? Can they avoid the trap of severe loneliness and the dangers of escapism and developing relationships that are not authentic to their calling as priests?

In this context, I want to address the transition between seminary life and the experience of priesthood itself. There have always been the inevitable challenges of adaptation from a heavily communal style of life to a much more independent way of organizing one's life, from a ready-made circle of associates and potential friends to an environment where one needs more assertively to search out supports and to learn the necessary skills of survival, personally and interpersonally. However, this challenge is magnified in an age of small ordination classes, a shrinking presbyterate, and an aging clergy trained at a different time, historically and ecclesially. One positive advantage of today's seminaries is the great diversity we find in age groupings and in cultural backgrounds. During their years of formation, seminarians become used to the idea of developing friendships with men of other age or ethnic cohorts and different social, theological, and cultural backgrounds. This is good training for coping with the early years of priesthood. I say this because most newly ordained priests will need to look outside their age groups for friendships and for support systems in general.

On the other hand, by way of contrast, many older priests are not prepared or willing to invite the recently ordained into their circle of friends. Most older priests were ordained in large classes and with fellow ordinands of more or less the same age. They left the seminary with solid friendships already established and have been able to sustain them, in their particular dioceses, throughout their priesthood. Now it is difficult for many of these priests, often exhausted in the later stages of life, to welcome into their company the recently ordained—who, in their early years as priests, will be moved regularly from one parish to another and who come into priesthood marked by generational differences socially, culturally, theologically, and spiritually. Do the older priests have the energy, and will it be worth the effort?

Fortunately, there are encouraging examples of older, more seasoned priests who manage to build into their schedules opportunities to meet and befriend the more recently ordained. They take time to listen with openness and respect to the particular values and priorities of men just moving into priesthood and sense intuitively that the questions and hopes of the recently ordained are windows into the souls of their peers in broader society. Many priests in my generation are coming more and more to realize that the Holy Spirit did not vanish from the scene in the late seventies and that we all have much



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## The newly ordained need to be encouraged to join support groups, to take time for prayer and recreation in order to nurture the spirit, and to be in conversation with a trusted spiritual director

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to learn, even from the less experienced. Indeed, we need to be open to the insights, needs, and hungers of those who come after us. We owe this to the younger generation of priests on the level of principle as leaders committed to communion among us, and on the level of responsibility as senior members of a presbyterate. We need to be tolerant and willing to receive as much as to give. It is true that, in some cases, there may be rigidity in the thinking of our younger counterparts. There is all the more reason, then, that we create an ambience of responsive acceptance and welcome so that all of us, the new and the more experienced, can learn to adapt together to the changing needs of our times.

### FOSTERING INTIMACY ESSENTIAL

As a result of shifting demographics and changing social and theological contexts, I have become more and more convinced over the years that if we are not to continue losing recently ordained priests at a national rate of one out of seven in their first five years of priesthood, seminaries and dioceses will need to find new ways of helping the newly ordained to make smooth transitions into priesthood. Together, we need to see to it that in first assignments, the newly ordained are placed with pastors who know how to support and encourage them and to invite them into

gatherings of brother priests—pastors who themselves are positive role models with an authentic love for their calling and the capacity to live the celibate life with joy or at least peaceful acceptance. The newly ordained also need mentors, or “big brothers,” outside the context of their assignments, who can listen to their concerns and offer constructive feedback and support. Moreover, the newly ordained need to be encouraged to join support groups, to take the time needed for prayer and recreation in order to nurture the spirit, and, at least from time to time, to be in conversation with a trusted spiritual director. In my judgment, too few dioceses are giving the kind of assistance our newly ordained need.

It is also true to say that seminaries must work hard to prepare candidates for the current reality of priestly ministry. Earlier, I mentioned national statistics that reveal a startling loss among recently ordained priests. Here in San Antonio, we have a very different experience. From 1996 to 2000, we lost only one out of twenty-three men ordained. Last year, we ordained seven, and up to now, as far as we can tell, all are doing well. There are probably many reasons for this, but I do know that a major reason has to do with the type of formation we are able to provide here in San Antonio. These past six years, our men, once ordained, tend to be ready for the lived experience of priesthood in their local churches. This is the topic of another article I have just finished writing and hope to publish soon.

It is my conviction and my experience, after nearly thirty-eight years in priesthood, that intimacy in the life of the priest can continue to grow and blossom throughout one's career if we remain connected in prayer to the source of life and if we recognize our interdependence as human persons. Personally, at this stage of my life, I find that I am able to love and be loved more freely and with fewer strings attached. I have gained this freedom from years of intimate experience with others of various backgrounds, cultures, and age groups, and I have learned that if we want to remain strong and happy as priests, we need to open our hearts to others and not be afraid of sharing mutually our experience with a diversity of folks. In doing this, we will witness to others the communion in God that all persons are called to share.



Very Reverend Gerald L. Brown, S.S., Ph.D., is rector-president of Assumption Seminary in the Archdiocese of San Antonio, Texas. A member of the Society of Saint Sulpice, he had done extensive work in the area of continuing formation for both diocesan and religious priests.



# Cross-Cultural Pastoral Intimacy

Gerald A. Arbuckle, S.M., Ph.D.

**C**ross-cultural pastoral intimacy is the ability to empathize with people of different cultures. It means understanding the purpose and power of culture in people's lives. It involves grasping someone else's way of experiencing life and risking being changed by that experience.

Cross-cultural intimacy is a challenge for priests not only in their parishes or other ministries but also, increasingly, within their own rectories. They find themselves living with priests from different parts of the world who have unfamiliar cultural and linguistic backgrounds. What can be done to help them feel at home and understood? More perplexing is the fact that although priests of the same country as their own are living with them, their ways of thinking and acting have become very different over time. They may have attended the same college and seminary, but they have become difficult for their fellow priests to understand. It is as though they come from a different country and culture. What has happened to them? What can we do to understand them better?

In order to offer answers to these questions, it is necessary to clarify the meaning of culture, culture change, culture types, and culture shock. It is then possible to suggest practical ways to develop pastoral intimacy with people of different cultures. Though this article concentrates on the challenges of cross-cultural intimacy within rectories or ministries, what is said also applies in many instances to the

multicultural challenges priests increasingly find in our parishes.

## DEFINING CULTURE

The way culture is conceptualized has significant bearing on the ways in which pastoral intimacy is established and maintained across cultural barriers. The definition of culture I find most helpful for priests seeking cross-cultural intimacy is this: *Culture is a pattern of shared assumptions or values, expressed in its constituent parts—namely, symbols, myths and rituals that have been invented, discovered, or developed by a group as it struggles to cope with problems of external adaptation and internal cohesion, instructing its adherents about what is considered to be the orderly and correct way to feel, think, and behave.*

Note the emphasis in the definition on the way to feel, not just the way to think and behave. Culture is first how people feel collectively about important things in life. Notice also the words *correct* and *orderly*. People want to feel secure and safe within an orderly environment because what we most fear as humans is chaos or disorder. Think about a simple fact of life: How easy is it for you to give up your favorite armchair to a visitor, for a day or a week? How comfortable are you when your daily routine is suddenly changed, even in little things? Confused? Ill at ease? Culture is about felt order, the maintenance



of the predictable. When things are out of order, we do not feel at peace until they are returned to what we feel to be their rightful place.

The constituent elements of all cultures are symbols, myths, and rituals. Symbols are felt or experienced meanings. When I see a photograph of my mother, I experience her presence, not just as a thought but as a living and vital presence. Symbols are multivocal—that is, they accumulate layer upon layer of meaning over time. Thus, two people in the same rectory may use the word *church* and think they are communicating, but then discover that they are not being understood, simply because the word evokes different feelings and meanings for different people.

We can never be neutral in the presence of symbols; they cause us to react in positive or negative ways. For example, a Roman collar may cause some people to react with anger because of a bad experience they have had with a priest, and some to react positively because the collar is a symbol of service for them. Symbols relate primarily to the heart of people, so that rational or logical attacks on them do not necessarily destroy their importance.

A myth, contrary to its popular meaning, is a set of narrative symbols or a story that retells a truth so important to group identity that it cannot be articulated in precise and technical or unexpressive language. Myths are value-impregnated beliefs or stories binding a group of people together at the deepest level of their group life—beliefs or stories that they live by and live for. Without myths, people have no reason to be or to act, no place in the universe.

Every culture contains founding myths that collectively bind people together. For example, the founding myth of the United States is that it is the New Exodus; the monarchies of Europe have failed and become corrupt, but God will lead the American people into a new world of democracy, of freedom and equality for all. Founding myths are like beams in a house. They are not exposed to outside view, but they are the inner and essential structure or social glue that binds people together in a unique culture. When I trained for the priesthood before Vatican II, I imbibed the mythology of the time: that the church must maintain walls to protect it from the modern world and from Protestant “heresies”; that the priest is the intermediary between people and God; that the laity are to be passive receivers of our services.

Ritual, the third element of culture, is what we see. It is the stylized use of bodily movement within a social context that expresses and articulates the meaning. Ritual is the outward sign of the inner power of symbols and myths. An outsider finds it difficult to appreciate the ritual surrounding the respect for the American flag, but insiders recognize that the ritual

of showing the flag publicly testifies to their commitment to stand up for freedom and that millions in the nation feel the same. This was dramatically evident in September 2001, when people spontaneously flew the flag following the tragic terrorist attacks in New York, Washington, D.C., and Pennsylvania.

## CULTURAL CHANGE

A sudden change in the mythic structure of a people is generally a catastrophic experience for them, since the mythic structure is, in the last analysis, the way people obtain identity, impose order on the world, and hold back chaos. For example, success is an integral value in American mythology. When the United States failed to win the wars in Korea and Vietnam, the nation collectively experienced a sadness, a sense of lostness. What had gone wrong? The founding mythology had temporarily ceased to work, and people lost their sense of identity and security.

Globalization is having similar culturally disturbing effects in many parts of the world. It is forcing millions of people to change their lives dramatically. Old identities are crumbling, and people are turning to nationalistic and fundamentalist movements to help restore their sense of balance. We see this tragically played out, for example, in fundamentalist movements like those in Waco, Texas (the Branch Davidians), the Balkans, and Afghanistan (the Taliban).

## SUBCULTURAL DIFFERENCES

One final clarification is necessary before we begin to apply the theory to cross-cultural intimacy among priests. We readily accept and understand that priests who come from a different country than ours will have many different ways of thinking, feeling, and acting. But what about those colleagues who belong to our own culture yet seem to have become different over the years? Is it at all possible that they have developed cultural qualities that are not ours? The answer is yes.

Every culture will be made up of subcultures. A subculture describes those special worlds of interest and sense of belonging that set apart some individuals and groups from the wider culture (e.g., youth subculture). Within the church and presbyterate today there are many subcultures, mostly as a consequence of Vatican II and its radical reorientation of the church's mythological foundations. Three subcultures in particular stand out:

- a pre-Vatican II church subculture;
- a Vatican II subculture; and
- a restorationist subculture (i.e., people who feel



that the church has drifted away from orthodoxy and want to take it back to the power structures and attitudes of a pre-Vatican II church).

People in the first and third subcultures have been so disoriented by the mythological changes in Vatican II that they yearn for the security of the past. The difference between the first and third groups is that the latter actively campaign, even intolerantly so, to reshape the church according to the pre-Vatican II model. In the same rectory, therefore, there can be priests representing all three theologically based subcultures, who belong at the same time to one's country and secular culture, as well as priests from cultures outside one's own country (who may of course also belong to one of the above subcultures of the church).

## MODELS OF CULTURES

Given the daunting number and array of cultures and subcultures in the world, priests ask whether there is some way to place them in categories in order to understand them better. To answer questions of this kind, anthropologists construct culture models. An anthropological model is not a perfect representation of the real world at all, but a highlighting of major emphases to be found in cultures. Nuanced explanations or details are omitted to allow us to grasp a little more clearly what is in reality a highly complex situation. Any particular culture is then compared with the model to see to what extent it resembles it or not.

In her analysis of cultures, anthropologist Mary Douglas suggests four models based on two variables: group and grid. The group is the social unit, and the grid is the set of rules or structures (tangible or intangible), whereby people relate to others on an ego-centered basis. As I significantly reshape her models for the purpose of this article, the distinction between the variables will become clearer.

**Strong Group/Strong Grid Culture.** In this model, change takes place extremely slowly, if at all. Intense loyalty to the group and to the grid (traditional symbols and structures) is expected, and rituals that celebrate and reinforce identity and unity are of fundamental importance. Anyone who questions the status quo is seen as a threat and must be forced into conformity or expelled.

This model is helpful in understanding behavior patterns in the pre-Vatican II Church. Boundaries were clear, Catholics being defined in opposition to Protestants and a dangerous world of modernity. Internal administrative structures and statutes were rigidly hierarchical and unchanging; rituals were for-

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**Within the church and presbyterate today there are many subcultures, mostly as a consequence of Vatican II and its radical reorientation of the church's mythological foundations**

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mal and impersonal, reinforcing a sense of spiritual and clerical elitism. God was commonly presented as the remote Almighty and Unchanging One, Creator/Regulator, and Christ as King, Savior, and Judge of people who break "the rules." External conformity to rules was more important than a personal relationship with Christ; morality was more concerned with sexual and private sins than with social issues of justice and human rights.

If a priest in my rectory fits any of the following descriptions, then he is likely to feel at home in a culture that approximates the above model: a preacher who presents God as a remote and fear-evoking presence and one who counts even the smallest of our faults; one opposed to any changes in the church, however small; one who believes that laity must listen to and do what the priest tells them and sweepingly condemns what is happening in the world (a "nothing is right with the world" attitude).

**Strong Group/Weak Grid Culture.** In this model, the sense of belonging to this group rather than to another is strongly felt. There is, however, a lack of clarity as to how individuals are to relate to one another. People are forever intensely suspicious of each other, for they fear that others will take advantage of them. Sects and cults emerge that give people a sense of belonging in the midst of a confusing



world. Some groups will yearn for “the old days” and actively campaign to take the group back to the past, scapegoating particular individuals or groups for causing the confusion. A culture of this type is prone to fundamentalism because it flourishes whenever sacred traditions collapse or are threatened. Fundamentalists are intolerant of people who dare to differ from them or even to raise questions about the correctness of their beliefs.

This model describes the restorationist groups in the church today. They search for familiar roots and are quick to condemn others for unorthodoxy and lack of loyalty to traditions. The task of the priest and hierarchical officials is to impose order and maintain it against all attacks. The church must withdraw from the “evil” world, as it did when faced with the demands of modernity in the centuries prior to Vatican II, thus avoiding social justice issues or theologies that promote them (e.g., liberation theology).

A priest comfortable with restorationism will fit one or more of the following descriptions: a priest who sees secular humanism undermining the religious heritage of the nation and the church through a conspiracy of liberals, media, feminists, and leftists in theology and ecclesiastical institutions; a selective reader of ecclesial documents (e.g., papal letters on social justice are not referred to in preaching); one who is overly concerned about accidentals (e.g., in liturgies); a priest nostalgic for a pre-Vatican II golden age, when it was assumed that the church had been a powerful force in the world, with one universally accepted liturgy, undivided by “misguided” devotees of social justice and inculturation; one who vehemently and intolerantly attacks coreligionists who are committed to Vatican II and papal social encyclicals; a priest with the elitist assumption that he has all the answers.

**StrongGrid/Weak Group Culture.** In this culture type, people are strongly individualistic and competitive but have a weak sense of belonging to the group. Relationships are superficial and maintained as long as they benefit the individuals in their efforts to succeed in life. Capitalist societies approximate very well to this model. So also does Alexis de Tocqueville’s famous description of American culture in the first part of the nineteenth century: a culture permeated by both a rhetoric of equality and a strong emphasis on personal success, with a weak commitment to the group at the same time. This is a “me-ism” or self-fulfillment culture: I join the group only as long as it does not require me to follow any rules that would interfere with my journey to success.

As regards the church, people who mirror this culture model see God as the junior partner in their

road to success; the images of God and the church are molded according to their usefulness. Teachings of the church are selected according to this criterion. Within the United States a significant number of Catholics have opted for this utilitarian model of the church. One survey recorded that 54 percent of Catholic men and 41 percent of women believe that one can be a good Catholic without obeying the church on abortion. Catholic schools are popular, provided they exalt the virtues of self-discipline and individual achievement; the moment they insist on issues of social justice or the welfare of the common good, they are seen as irrelevant and obstructive of individual success in this world.

Priests who are comfortable with this culture model tend to refuse to critique their secular culture, to be competitive in seeking ecclesiastical appointments, to enjoy the company of rich and powerful friends, and to dress expensively, even when in clerical attire.

**Weak Group/Weak Grid Culture.** A culture of this type is strongly egalitarian in social relationships and in gender, with minimum pressure from structures within and at the boundaries of the group. Dress codes and rigid rules of conduct based on tradition are considered irrelevant. Far more important is the interior conversion and effective commitment of members to their faith communities.

Concrete examples of this model are the early Christian community in Jerusalem (Acts 1:12 ff.), a religious congregation in the first stage of founding, and small faith communities (e.g., basic ecclesial communities). For many faith communities, God in Christ is an understanding Liberator, one with whom the oppressed of this world can identify. Liturgies are simple and mirror the living faith experience of the members, as well as the model of the church as a pilgrim in this world. Members recognize that on the basis of baptism, they are called to evangelize through diverse ministries; there will be a social justice component in all ministries. Every member has a particular role within the group; so also do clerics, but they are not singled out for special status or influence beyond what their sacramental duties require of them.

A priest who works out of this model has an intimate personal relationship to Christ and cultivates a simple lifestyle. His homilies reflect a deep knowledge and love of the scriptures. He is pastorally flexible about church regulations that are of accidental importance; able to collaborate with laity; committed to developing faith communities based on scripture reflection; loyal to the church, particularly having in mind the model of church as the People of God; committed to social justice; and compassionate toward people who differ from himself (e.g., in ecclesiology).



## ACHIEVING CROSS-CULTURAL INTIMACY

Cultural intimacy, says Paul VI, can be achieved only “with discernment, respect and competency.” All three qualities are difficult to acquire. What does competency mean? How can it be achieved? How can I make sense of negative feelings toward priests who belong to different cultures or subcultures, whether theologically or secularly based? Before answering these questions, it will be helpful to explain why culture shock is a common experience when people meet unfamiliar cultural environments. If these experiences are not acknowledged and addressed, cross-cultural intimacy is impossible.

**Culture Shock.** Several years ago I attended a month-long live-in seminar for priests from different parts of the world. At first the diversity of the large group was most appealing, but as time went by I found myself becoming annoyed with priests who either had a different theological view of life and the church or had unusual ways of speaking English. I would say to myself, “If only they could be like me in their thinking and speaking! It would then be possible to enter into enriching dialogue.” At last I realized that I was suffering from culture shock, and action was urgently needed.

Inevitably, when we meet cultures different from our own, we are surprised—at times even jolted—by what people think and do. The unfamiliar leaves us perplexed; we simply don’t know how to handle the situation. The expression “culture shock,” in general, is a label for a wide variety of different possible responses to culture-contact stress, which may include disorientation, depression, apathy, and irrational or inappropriate responses. It is a reaction that is blind and unreasoned—a strong, often subconscious desire to escape from a culturally uncomfortable atmosphere and seek refuge in the familiar setting of one’s culture or subculture. In brief, culture shock can be defined as a psychological disorientation caused by misunderstanding or not knowing the cues of another culture. It arises from such things as lack of knowledge, limited prior experience, and personal fear of the unknown.

We should not be surprised to find ourselves experiencing culture shock. We may think we are in full control of our feelings; then suddenly, for no apparent reason, they seem to take over, and we become judgmental and harsh in our assessments of others’ behavior. What can we do?

- Acknowledge that culture shock is neither good nor bad; it is a reality that many experience when in unexpected situations. The stressful negative

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feelings are signs to us that it is time to develop a more understanding approach to the culture jolts resulting from intercultural contacts.

- Recognize that three levels of competency are required to achieve cross-cultural intimacy: cognitive, affective, and operational.

### LEVELS OF COMPETENCY

**Cognitive Competency.** Cognitive competency is factual knowledge that a person acquires about visible cultural differences of people. Explanations can prevent considerable misunderstanding and conflicts later. For example, East Asian peoples are often puzzled when their Western hosts keep asking them what they would like to do or eat. In their own Asian cultures, hosts are supposed to anticipate the needs of guests. Also, different notions of time are notorious for causing intercultural tensions. Folk cultures place priority on relationships, not on time schedules; people will make appointments, but if an issue regarding a relationship should emerge in the meantime, then that will take precedence. Westerners prefer to keep to time commitments, even to the extent of jeopardizing relationships.

A similar competency is required for priests living or working with other priests who have different theological, pastoral, or national cultural/subcultural meaning systems. Fellow priests do not normally expect us to agree with their own particular customs, but they do want us to accept that their actions are different and may have merit.



**Affective Competency.** People with affective competency keep sharpening their own human sensors of listening, empathy, and feeling. Empathetic listening across the cultural barriers is the struggle to view the world as the other does, to become more sensitive not just to the reasons people are different but also to the feelings behind differences. It is vital to know a people's pivotal symbols and myths and their inner meanings. People will willingly recount their myths in an affective way only if the questioner is recognized as someone who deeply respects them as persons. Empathetic listening does not mean that the listener has to agree with the speaker.

Affective competency requires hard and sometimes painful work. It involves becoming aware of one's own cultural values and prejudices and their ability to block one's ability to listen to others. All cultures have prejudicial stereotypes of other cultures. A stereotype is a set of images that one group has of others different from themselves; it is a shorthand method of handling a complex world of people, but as a ready-made prejudgment, it is faulty and often unjust. People of one theologically based subculture can have negative stereotypes of other theological models. Cultural stereotypes, if left unidentified and unremoved, will obstruct the ability to empathize with people of another culture.

**Operational Competency.** This competency refers to people's ability to express their cognitive and affective experiences when communicating with others. They are bound to make mistakes but willingly seek to be corrected.

Compassion is the virtue particularly required here. It is that quality of love which is founded in our knowing and understanding each other. It accepts the reality that all are our brothers and sisters, though it will require considerable self-discipline for us to begin to put this belief into operation. Compassion acknowledges that others, like oneself, have weaknesses, and that it is an ongoing struggle to overcome them. In that sense, humility is an integral quality of compassion. The Good Samaritan and the gravely injured Jew belonged to mutually hostile, racism-based cultures. The Samaritan was marginalized on two scores: he was a particular type of trader that Samaritans and Jews distrusted, and he was looked down upon by Jews as racially inferior. Yet the knowledge of this twofold rejection disposed him to feel, with the injured Jew, rejected by his own people. Compassion transcended cultural differences and bonded the two together at the deepest level of their being.

Villagers in Fiji once explained to me why they appreciated the work of an American Jesuit missionary:

"When he comes into the village, we all feel ten feet taller and ten years younger. Somehow he touches our inner hearts just by being with us. No words!" When I asked the priest why he thought he could communicate so well with these culturally different people, he replied: "I believe deep within myself that the people do me an enormous favor by inviting me to enter their lives. I have things to teach them, but they have so much to teach me from their struggles to live and survive in a tumultuous world." That is cultural intimacy in action, founded in compassion.

We priests will relate to our fellow priests and to other people at a very superficial level indeed if we ignore their culture. Authentic pastoral intimacy without this knowledge is impossible. In *On Evangelization*, Paul VI describes the urgency for cross-cultural intimacy in this way: "What matters is to evangelize human culture and cultures (not in a purely decorative way, as it were, by applying a thin veneer, but in a vital way, in depth and right to their very roots)." John Paul II reiterated the same point in his recent apostolic letter *Social Concerns*, saying that we are called to be courageous in evangelizing an "increasingly diversified and demanding" globalizing world in which there is a "new and uncertain mingling of peoples and cultures."

If we are able to take up this challenge in relating to priests of different cultures in our midst, we will be able to relate to people of different cultures whom we serve in our ministries.

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# Joy Just Ahead

*James Torrens, S.J.*

## **A Prayer for Contagion**

You're alive with delight, boy,  
your nose at our chapel window  
as we all sing and clap inside.  
Wish you could hold that smile,

like an ever-young aunt of mine,  
full of the Nick as adult and mother,  
with something rustproof about her,  
some replenishing store.

Wouldn't holler us home but yodel.  
For dirty work she wore a bright kerchief.  
In her third age she twined odds and ends  
into pert shapes, and her funnybone held.

Joy isn't something you put on.  
In his dark hour, the ill-faring son  
welled with an oil of gladness.  
Joy, take us by contagion.

**R**eligious superiors have a long history of asking their members, "Are you happy in your vocation?" Plenty of people not in religious life can be asked this about their professional or married lives, but the searching question expressed above originates in an apostolic or contemplative setting. The standard answer, certainly, is "Yes," though we know that many departures from community in recent decades account for the strong quotient of "No." My purpose here is to focus on what the "Yes" answers often contain: something less sure, an unspoken "I guess." The "I guess" can mean this: I don't feel unhappy, but I don't really think about it. I've got a lot to shoulder right now. I'm committed to serving God and helping others; I'm giving it my best shot; that is going to have to do.

That's great, I would answer, so why not be full of joy? Easier said than done, of course. Joy is not something you can will or force. The apostolate and the contemplative life, like any other occupations, have their grueling and consuming works and days. Conflicts arise in the religious family that leave one's teeth on edge. There is the financial pinch, the conscience problems, and the major decisions that weigh on one, to say nothing of what Saint Paul confessed



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## Joy in the midst of trial is when the Holy Spirit really goes to work

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was his concern for all the churches (this is the full plate that bishops have). There is illness. There is a different formity to some human beings—the bread-and-butter personalities, the slightly acerbic ones. In other words, there is plenty to temper the fits of joyfulness.

But suppose we “look to Jesus, the pioneer and perfecter of our faith” (Heb. 12:2). When he was so busy preaching and healing that he didn’t have time to eat, did all that activity consume him? Was his joyfulness overshadowed? Not likely. If so, he would not have exercised that magnetic attraction that acted on everyone. He in fact brimmed with the Holy Spirit, the Trinitarian conveyor of joy. Saint Luke the evangelist makes that point explicit. Introducing the warm thanks of Jesus to his Father for hiding himself from the learned folks and showing himself to simple ones, Saint Luke says, “In that same hour he rejoiced in the Holy Spirit” (10:21).

How about the final stages of rejection of Jesus and the cruel imminence of his passion? He admitted, after all, “My soul is sorrowful even unto death.” Even on this threshold, Saint John tells us, he prayed for his followers that they might share the fullness of his joy—a joy deriving from his faithfulness to the divine plan. He told them they would be part of an unbreakable chain: “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full” (15:10–11).

How could Jesus be joyful when the darkness was closing in? Isn’t it unconscionable, even inhuman, to assume that? He cried out in his agony, after all. His dreams and, seemingly, his mission were turning out futile. Paradoxically, though, he could put in other hands the success or failure of this divine initiative to save the world; he could remain tranquil. Je-

sus was, after all, in touch with the source of life. He drew unshakable joy from this communion. Even at the nadir of his mortal life, before his glorious vindication, it would have been appropriate to address him, the Light of the World, in the words of the Greek hymn *Phos hilaron*: “O joyful light of holy glory, light of the undying heavenly father, who is blessed and holy.”

What Saint Paul tells us, and the liturgy too—to “put on Christ”—means entering into joy, being open to it, praying for it. It can seem that joy is the gift and prerogative of children. Just listen to them playing in the backyard or the schoolyard, with screeches of excitement. It does not take much to delight them. They do not have the bigger problems weighing on them. They are all happiness, innocence, belief, spontaneity. This is, of course, a rosy picture that the reality does not always match, because they pick up out of the air the family tensions, and their budding egos can trouble them, and hard experience can cloud their horizons. For a reminder of the hard lot of many children, we need only look back at the poems of William Blake, “Songs of Experience,” composed as a counterpoint to “Songs of Innocence.” Nonetheless, children are still, in themselves, a paradigm of joy. When Jesus says to be like them, we really do not need much exegesis about what he means.

What about adults, full of unrealized ambitions, weighed down with responsibilities, shadowed by failure? Do they end up like the traveler in Antonio Machado’s fine poem “El Viajero”? This traveler, who had set out from home early in life to seek his fortune, returns—or sends a photo of himself that the family hangs on the wall—with silvered hair, sadder but wiser. “Does he lament lost youth?” the poet asks. “It has stayed far away, dead, the poor wolf.” Again he asks: “Does he fear the gleaming youth that he never lived,/that has to sing at his door?” Machado the poet is really expressing, giving away, a lot about his own longings for a more idyllic time. Those understandable longings, given a golden glow by selective memory, do not help us much to mature.

Another course is possible: that of going forward toward joy in one’s life. Sometimes it is just called mellowing. Soon after World War I, in the most pessimistic of times, the novelist Hermann Hesse traced a mystical route for young searchers in the guru figure he created, Demian. In the novel that bears his name, Demian is guiding a younger and very green contemporary named Sinclair. Sinclair has many difficult phases to pass through, and at the end Demian compliments him for arriving at a childlike condition: “Sinclair, you are a child! You know that your destiny loves you.” Sinclair, thinking back on the excited pleasure of his boyhood holidays, admits as much:



I had been resigned to the belief that the loss of those glowing colors was inevitably linked to the loss of childhood, and that to some extent the freedom and adulthood of the soul had to be paid for with the renunciation of that lovely shining. . . . Now I saw delightedly that all of that had merely been covered over and thrown in the shade, and that it was possible, even for a liberated person giving up childish joys, to see the world in its radiance and to taste the intimate thrills of a child's viewpoint.

Does that sound like something out the sixties and early seventies? Well, yes. And it helps us remember that in those discordant times, there was a positive note—what the flower children were aiming for and sometimes hitting.

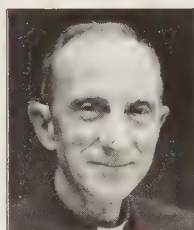
Joy takes one out of oneself. It is the spirit we need at the beginning of worship—in fact, of all authentic religion—as we learn from Psalm 100 (“The Old Hundredth”): “Cry out with joy to the Lord, all the earth./Serve the Lord with gladness./Come before him, singing for joy.” The Psalms—known in Hebrew as *Tehillim*, or “The Praises”—despite all their dark shadow, are predominantly joyful.

Mary, the Mother of Jesus, brought up in this spirit, responded with joy to the mysterious burden laid upon her at the Incarnation. Since it is for the world's salvation, “My spirit exults in God my Savior” (1:47). Or take the *Fioretti*, that bouquet of incidents from the life of Saint Francis in which we get his paradoxical definition of perfect joy. Francis imagines himself coming in on a wintry night, muddy and half-frozen, and being rejected by the gatekeeper of his own monastery. Suppose he tells his companion and straight man, Brother Leo, “I still stand at the

gate and say: ‘For the love of God, let me come in tonight.’ And the gatekeeper answers: ‘I won’t. Go to the hospital and ask there.’ I tell you, Brother Leo, that if I kept patience and was not upset—this would be true joy, and true virtue, and the salvation of the soul.”

We cannot very well command or rely on this level of response in our own case, but we can pray for it. We find it sometimes in the joy of martyrs, bred from their awareness of identifying with Christ. The prototype of such joy is in the *Acts of the Apostles*, when the apostles are beaten and charged not to speak in the name of Jesus. We read, “They left the presence of the council, rejoicing that they were counted worthy to suffer dishonor for the name” (5:41).

Joy in the midst of trial is when the Holy Spirit really goes to work. We can think of such a spirit, which we sometimes have the privilege of encountering, as an end point in the love of God. And the starting point? To wake up in the morning thanking God for opportunities ahead, even the tough ones. To keep one's imagination and humor alive during the humdrum or the hassles of the ensuing day. To whistle while one works (if there is not too much of Disney in that). And not to let the sun go down on us still boiling or chafing at someone or something.



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# Intimacy and the Good Life

*Reverend James Godin*

**T**wo mistakes led to this reflection. First mistake: I said I'd do it. Two other guys said no and suggested me. I should have been as wise. Second mistake: I asked four friends to make suggestions. So for the past month I have gotten notes, e-mails, phone messages, voice mails, postcards and a death threat. The threat was serious—not the death part. So from all of that here are a few reflections about intimacy, relationships, and the good life.

Let's get the threat out of the way. My friend says, "If you don't say right up front that this is all about loving, I should kill you." A very good point. Too much head analysis could keep us from the heart and soul and guts of intimacy. It is about loving. Like all of God's best gifts loving is beautiful and terrifying and absolutely necessary for any good life. It is also complicated and messy and out of control. Or it is also surprising, life giving and spontaneous. We say love is of God. At least a thousand times I have heard First Corinthians read at weddings reminding us that we can have all the eloquence and all the knowledge and faith to move mountains but without love we are NOTHING. That's clear. I know this is true. I have been there when no words, no wisdom and no prayer could do what the presence of one loving friend did. How many people facing death have I heard measure the worth of their lives only by how well they have

loved and been loved. This intimacy thing is about loving. There is nothing like it.

There is nothing else like it. I don't need to remind you that nothing can replace the experience of a sustained commitment to the sharing of ourselves with another. A couple of my friends strongly suggest I talk about the seduction. This in my life is the sweet promise of addiction. The seduction that says this bottle (a fine scotch in my case), or this pill, or this job, or this sex, or this thing, or this pie, or this Ph.D., or this position, or this web site, or this . . . will make me happy, satisfied and holy. They all have such sweet promise, but cannot deliver. Only the hard work of growing as a healthy, holy and loving human can satisfy that deep hunger. It is impossible to be human without the tender, loving care of intimate friends. The next problem with the seduction of these things is that the more we rely on them as cheap substitutes the more we diminish ourselves. We regress. We become less human and less loving. Our relationships with God, with others and with ourselves all suffer. Real intimacy makes us more truly human and loving. Relying on false intimacy makes us immature, self-centered and inhumane. Sounds like a problem that may be spread throughout our society.

There is another intimacy that is related to our ministry that we have to keep in its proper place.

Many of us touch people's lives at very tender or tragic moments. At these times hearts are laid bare and very intimate connections can be shared. Many of us in our preaching and teaching reveal bits and pieces of our own life journeys. In counseling sessions or in spiritual direction and retreat work we may share some peak human experiences. These can be very intimate moments. They are not and cannot replace the intimate relationships that stretch our hearts and deepen our souls throughout a sustained commitment to share our self with another. Paying the proper attention required to sustain the intimate relationships in our lives helps us to maintain and respect the proper boundaries those other intimate human moments in our ministry demand.

### INTIMACY DEMANDS HONESTY

The court jester, the anchor and the three-legged stool are all metaphors that came up in conversation. Intimate relationships, like court jesters, call us to a deeper honesty and integrity and an authentic humility. When we are too easily fooling others our friends can hold the mirror to our faces. When we are too full of ourselves a good friend like the court jester can deflate our exaggerated notions. When we are tempted to be someone else our intimate relationships call us back to our first vocation, to be the person God has called us to be. Like a good solid anchor our intimate relationships provide a source of deeper strength against the daily storms and the regular temptations to give in. They help us to hold our ground. They challenge us to respond with integrity and faithfulness rather than react out of anger or fear. The three-legged stool is one friend's reminder that it was not a mistake that Jesus linked love of God with love of neighbor and love of self. When we grow in our love for another we are dragged into (invited into) growth in our love for God and self. Jesus makes it very clear that the happy, healthy holy man loves God, neighbor and self.

"Stop your whining!" I didn't think I was whining when one friend said that. His point is that all of us humans, not just us ordained humans, struggle with intimacy in relationships. He and I belong to a group of guys who have met regularly for 13 years. The seven of us cover a wide spectrum of men's experience. We have had to learn each other's styles of communicating. We have helped each other to learn to feel and to express those feelings. We have learned that all men struggle with the skills and discipline needed to create the climate that allows intimate relationships to develop. None of us learned very much growing up in our families about those skills and discipline. Some of us have been able to connect with

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**Wasting time with a friend is to step out of the rush of efficient production and into the pace that respects the rhythms of heart and soul**

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men who were willing to share on a deeper level. We've learned from their example. We've learned much just by hanging in there for these many years.

### IMPORTANCE OF WASTING TIME

Intimate relationships, deep friendships and long-term commitments are countercultural. Welcome to my soapbox. For 11 years I worked with college students in campus ministry. Every Wednesday at 5 p.m. we served spaghetti for anyone who wanted it. I was amazed at how few of those students had any experience of a regular family meal. Work demands, school demands, church demands and others keep us from developing the intimate relationships we need as humans. There's hardly enough time and energy left for one intimate relationship. And we all need more than that. We move from one city to another to satisfy our work demands. We adjust our schedules to work more efficiently. We spend more time learning more skills to be more productive. And there is no time or energy left to be with our friends, our spouses, our children or our God. Intimacy demands wasting time with the other. Wasting time is a sin in our culture. My work addiction loves this kind of thinking. Wasting time is not highly structured, focused, timed or evaluated. Wasting time is idle conversation or no conversation or conversation for as long as it takes. Wasting time is for cuddling or just reading in the same room. Wasting time is for a walk or for listening to music. Wasting time with a friend is to step out of the rush of efficient production and into the pace that respects the rhythms of heart and



soul. Wasting time abandons the tyranny of the calendar and clock to nourish the hungers of our starving hearts with an attentive presence to the other.

My friends who are women remind me that most of what I really know about women I learned from them. Taking the risks and negotiating the boundaries that respect our various commitments to marriage and celibacy has been worth the effort. Not easy, but worth it. As they have allowed me to become part of their lives I have come to know them as women, sisters, mothers, workers, managers, believers and friends. My life and my ministry are much richer because of these relationships. Knowing and loving them makes me unable to tolerate the glib stereotypes that some men use referring to women. Knowing and loving these women has allowed us to have some heart-to-heart sharing about the real experiences we have of being men and women in our society and in our church. We've also shared some great good humor about it all.

My friends who are men want equal time. Yes, it is true. Most of what I really know about men I learned from them. Everything else in the preceding paragraph applies as well. Just make the appropriate gender adjustments.

## LACK OF CONTROL

I am a lousy friend. I am not the greatest at keeping in touch. I lose track of the time since we last talked. I let work get in the way. I am learning the rituals and discipline that intimacy requires. I am getting better at making the choices that growing in intimacy requires. I am learning with the help of my friends. Meals, movies, phone calls, plays and play days are my favorite ways to waste time with friends. Vacation time together combines all those favorite things. Honoring and celebrating birthdays, anniversaries of marriage or ordination and other holy days help provide some ritual for our relationships.

This takes planning. It requires driving from one end of the diocese to the other. I have to call soon enough to allow the necessary negotiating. I have to be open to a variety of ways of celebrating. Do I hear, "Stop your whining?" As one of my 12-step sponsors would always say, "It's progress we're after, not perfection."

"I would never trust a pastor who doesn't have friends." One of my friends sent that one-line e-mail. I called for an explanation. I agree with what I heard. A pastor without friends is a danger sign, a walking red flag. There is some deep wound in need of healing. There may be too much self, leaving no room for the other. Years of cynicism may have hardened the heart and dried the soul. This is a pastor who can do very little good and very great harm. This is true of all humans without intimate friends. Extraverts beware. Popular pastors with so many friends sometimes end up with no intimate friends.

Intimacy is not mine, not yours and not ours. Intimate relationships are not controlled by me, or you, or us. We do our best to create a climate that makes intimacy possible. The honesty, maturity, mutuality and commitment that intimacy requires do not guarantee that intimacy will develop. There is room for grace here. This lack of control separates intimacy from infatuation and obsession. A free choice to cooperate with grace is required again and again to help intimate relationships grow. This lack of control and predictable growth can drive goal-oriented males crazy. This lack of control can be the not so gentle reminder that intimate life, like all life, is God's gift. And what a gift it is!



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# Impediments to Intimacy

*Mary Elizabeth Kenel, Ph.D.*

I chose to use the word *impediments* in the title of this article because its roots in the Latin *impedimenta* seem most appropriate. *Impedimenta*, or impediments, you may recall, are defined as the “baggage or other encumbrances that impede one’s progress.” The term was used especially to describe the food and clothing, arms, and artillery carried by an army in the supply carts that accompanied it. When it comes to issues of intimacy, we also carry a heavy load of baggage and other encumbrances, both cultural and personal, along with us.

One piece of our cultural baggage, nonrelational sexuality, has resulted from socialization practices arising from a gender-based power structure. Priests and other male religious, having been raised in a society of this type, are not immune to the attitudes fostered by a socialization that is aimed at attaining and maintaining power. Thus, for many men, such traits as toughness, competitiveness, self-reliance, and emotional stoicism are highly developed, whereas those emotions associated with caring, connection, and vulnerability are suppressed. When these “softer” emotions are present in a man, they may be experienced as a source of conflict or tension. Boys lacking athletic skills or displaying emotional vulnerability are often labeled “sissies” and perceived as not being “real boys.” A boy who senses that he is

a disappointment to his father or who is subjected to taunts from his peers may learn to hide under a facade of toughness or may withdraw from relationships.

Another piece of societal baggage derives from the fact that men are infrequently trained to develop emotional empathy—the capacity to place one’s self in another’s shoes in order to perceive how the other might feel. Having limited ability to read their own emotions and those of others, men are hard-pressed to develop relationships that are emotionally intimate. Many formation or seminary programs do not specifically address relationship issues, as their focus is on theological studies. Those men who participate in clinical pastoral education or similar training programs are frequently better equipped to identify and work with their feelings, at least as they play out in active ministry. Educated to see themselves in a counseling or helping role, these men may be quite sensitive to the feelings of those who seek them out in times of distress. This is often, however, a “one-way intimacy,” as the nature of the relationship does not allow for mutuality, and a similar level of sharing often does not occur with peers. Those who are members of religious communities may fare somewhat better, as some communities have incorporated group discussion or group processing into their way of life



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## Under the guise of virtue, the lonesome hero is able to maintain interpersonal distance and a sense of himself as strong, competent, and able to go it alone

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as part of their effort to foster greater intimacy in the community context.

Societal encouragement for men to transform vulnerable feelings into anger also serves to impair intimacy. Replacing a feeling such as anxiety or grief with anger often leads to confusion on the part of the person receiving the response. When the question "What is he so angry about?" does not prompt an adequate explanation or response, others become more inclined to keep their distance in order to avoid wrath that seems to have no foundation in the reality of a situation. This transformation of vulnerability into anger is frequently met when men are experiencing depression. Equating sadness or tearfulness with weakness, men tend to hide such responses from themselves as well as from others. While discharge of anger may give a person a sense of power or vitality, the respite from feelings of sadness is only temporary. The distancing that so often results from using this defensive anger pattern only increases the man's level of social and emotional isolation, compounding the problem and making it far more difficult for him to obtain the emotional support and mental health interventions that are needed.

### LONESOME HERO

Still another way in which societal pressures impair the establishment of intimate relationships is through the promotion and glorification of the archetypal "lonesome hero." Actor John Wayne leaving

behind a lovely and loving woman and riding off into the sunset is an example of this sort of imagery. The appeal of the lonesome hero for men vowed to celibacy is understandably strong, as it offers a convenient and acceptable cover for interpersonal insecurity. By subtly emphasizing the lonesome aspect, many priests appear to invite others, especially women, into close relationships with them. Once their immediate needs for support are met, however, they find ways to disengage and to justify their unwillingness to commit the time and emotional investment required in an intimate relationship. Under the guise of virtue, perhaps manifested as "availability to all," the lonesome hero is able to maintain interpersonal distance and a sense of himself as strong, competent, and able to go it alone. The recognition he receives for his seeming dedication to his work serves to bolster an ego that is far more fragile than others might imagine.

### NONSEXUAL INTIMACY ELUSIVE

Although our society teaches young men to avoid emotional intimacy and to develop a nonrelational sexuality, our socialization practices also teach men to sexualize all feelings of emotional and physical closeness. To the extent that this message goes unchallenged, whether by family or by seminary training, men's ability to experience nonsexual intimacy is impaired. This is particularly true in the case of sexually active young men who learn to associate sex and intimacy closely. Failure to distinguish between the two is compounded by a culture that tends to give only cursory attention to men's needs for intimacy. Placing emphasis on men's sexual needs at the expense of their intimacy needs leads to a restricted capacity for developing and maintaining interpersonal relationships. In later life, men who wish to replace feelings of emotional distance with feelings of closeness often misinterpret the latter as sexual. Intimacy with male peers may lead to "homosexual panic." Relationships with women may be contaminated by compulsive sexual overtures. When strong sexual feelings are aroused and are considered unacceptable, men may project them onto the other person—for example, by seeing the other as the one whose sexual overtures are inappropriate—and then use this misperception as an excuse to withdraw from the relationship.

Fear of the potential for a relationship to become eroticized is not limited to persons whose upbringing has failed to help them distinguish between sexual needs and needs for intimacy, however. The achievement of psychological intimacy, that combination of solace and pleasure derived from a mutual relation-

ship, does establish a special bond between two people that encourages them to regard each other in a different light and fosters feelings of attachment. Psychological intimacy creates a safe, trusting environment in which the relationship may continue to grow. As a result, it is not unusual for some of the responses to that bond between two persons to be perceived in terms of sexual intimacy. This is not to say that such feelings always occur or, if they occur, that they may not be fleeting. Many who establish intimate relationships report little or no awareness of erotic feelings for the other. The potential for such feelings to be generated, however, does suggest the need for appropriate care for oneself and the partner when involved in an intimate relationship.

The presence of erotic feelings and the speed with which they develop within the context of an intimate relationship are predicated on a number of factors. One factor to be considered is the reason for the relationship: Is the relationship based on friendship, or is it a professional relationship? The mutual sharing of a deep friendship is more likely to lead to arousal of sexual feelings, whereas the boundaries of a professional relationship offer at least some safeguard against acting out such feelings, should they arise. In fact, such activity is considered a breach of ethics if it occurs in the context of a professional relationship. The nature of other emotional attachments already established also influences the arousal and expression of sexual feelings. Persons whose needs for intimacy are relatively well met are less likely to seek immediate gratification of sexual desire than those who are starving for love and affection. Other factors include the ages of those involved, their gender and sexual orientation, and their social status. Given higher concentrations of hormones, younger people are more likely to experience sexual arousal and to experience it more quickly than are older people. Arousal is also contingent upon one's gender and sexual orientation being compatible with the other person's. Social status also comes into play in determining arousal and the likelihood of sexual expression. Priests, generally viewed as having high social status, are likely to be the objects of sexual arousal. This, of course, also gives them additional power in relationships, as they are able to initiate or reject sexual overtures. Sometimes relationships, whether based on professional concerns or mutual friendship, are ended abruptly because one person cannot tolerate the level of sexual excitement that is generated and worries that the presence of sexual feelings will lead to overt sexual behavior. The presence of these feelings may prove all the more disturbing if they lead to questions of sexual identity, sexual orientation, or vocational commitment.

Raising such issues may stimulate the need for a level of self-scrutiny in which a person is unwilling or unprepared to engage.

## FEAR OF ENGULFMENT

Still another impediment to intimacy that may afflict both men and women is a condition known as emotional claustrophobia—a fear that one will be engulfed psychologically by another. This fear of engulfment is counterbalanced by a fear of loneliness, and an approach-avoidance conflict is generated as a result. Feeling lonely or disconnected from others moves a person to seek out other people, to spend time with them, to enter into relationships that are emotionally close. During this “honeymoon” phase, all may appear to go well with a relationship. There comes a point, however, at which fear of engulfment overrides the desire for connection, and the relationship becomes a burden. At that point, the person's efforts are aimed not at fostering the relationship but at escaping from it. This can be especially problematic when the person lacks sufficient insight to correctly identify the problem and seek consciously to meet the need for additional space. Lacking insight, the person may begin to find fault with the partner, relationship, or situation and strike out angrily in an effort to regain a sense of freedom. In the case of a priest or religious, this need to escape the relationship may be disguised under the demands of celibacy.

Sometimes fear of engulfment is rooted in negative past experiences in which one did not know how to set limits on others or how to define what he or she was able to do or give in a certain situation. At other times, however, this fear is an accurate, intuitive response to people or situations that are overly demanding. If, for example, a person proves to be invasive or aggressive, then fear of engulfment is quite realistic and legitimate. If that is not the case, however, the fear is probably related to internal difficulties. While it is impossible to do justice here to all the potential sources that might give rise to fear of engulfment, one might wish to consider at least a few common causes.

The family, the matrix in which our relational life develops, is a primary source of later difficulties. In some instances parents and other caregivers may have been physically, sexually, or emotionally abusive, inclined to disregard boundaries and invade privacy. Other areas of concern might be related to a family atmosphere characterized by intense jealousy, possessiveness, highly unrealistic expectations, or manipulative demands that sides be taken in situations of marital strife. Fear of engulfment may also stem



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## People who choose the path of celibacy often feel that they and their way of life are defined in terms of a deficiency

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from an excessively symbiotic maternal-child relationship or from relationships entered into at later points that seemed to devour one's whole life. Sometimes relationships entered into during adolescence or emerging adulthood, for example, consume all a person's energy, as the partner's dependency needs may be excessive. In some situations, one person's demand for attention and affection is so overwhelming that the threat of suicide may be invoked to keep the other in the relationship. Freeing oneself from the toxicity of past relationships and negative experiences will allow one to take a clearer, more realistic view of current relationships and the legitimacy of their demands.

Fear of engulfment may also be related to a fear of managing one's own anger, anxiety, or sexual arousal. Although these emotions feel very different, when they are intensely stimulated, persons experiencing them feel as if they might lose control of their bodies—a frightening state of being. Intense feelings can cause conflict, confusion, and stress, as well as drastic alterations in heart rate, hormone production, breathing, and temperature. If one reacts to a certain individual or situation with a degree of rage, physical desire, or anxiety that feels unacceptable or unmanageable, the reaction may be experienced as fear of engulfment. To overcome fear that is engendered in this manner, it is necessary to identify and probe the underlying emotions. For example, if fear of engulfment is related to difficulties in managing anger, one needs to explore the roots of the anger and learn appropriate anger-management techniques. If anxiety lies at the root of fear of engulfment and also manifests itself in other situations, the treatment of choice may focus on reduction of anxiety and panic attacks.

Such treatment may involve the use of medication as well as other mental health interventions. If, on the other hand, unacceptable or undesirable levels of sexual feelings or sexual behavior underlie emotional claustrophobia, it would be helpful to explore one's attitudes and beliefs about sex. Perhaps the source of the difficulty lies in mixed messages received about sex that have never been clarified. One can do a simple inventory of sexual attitudes while journaling. It may be more helpful, however, to discuss the matter with a mental health professional who has training and experience in matters pertaining to sexuality and its expression in priests and religious.

### INTIMACY WITHIN CELIBACY

Accepting a definition of intimacy that is highly restricted is yet another way societal influences work against development of a broad spectrum of intimate relationships. Intimacy encompasses our capacity to make commitments to particular individuals in relationships that last over time while adapting to change within these relationships in ways that do not compromise our integrity. Society, however, tends to equate "intimacy" with genital sexual activity and denigrates other forms of relationship by perceiving them as "lacking intimacy." As a result, people who choose the path of celibacy often feel that they and their way of life are defined in terms of a deficiency. This perception sometimes evolves into a sense of personal inadequacy, a perception that one is incapable of establishing and maintaining an intimate relationship. At other times, acceptance of the societal view serves to focus the attention of priests and religious primarily on what is "lacking" in their celibate lifestyle rather than encouraging them to appreciate and develop other avenues of intimate relating.

Much satisfaction, for example, can be derived from an intellectual intimacy that involves the sharing of ideas and ideals, speaking from both mind and heart while grappling with questions of importance to the world and to one's particular life. Too often, however, such opportunities for intimate sharing are few and far between, sandwiched between the demands of our busy schedules. Or opportunities for sharing on this level are curtailed by our tendency to look for agreement with our own views, rejecting different views as bothersome, not worth our time, or perhaps unorthodox. This latter attitude often short-circuits discussions at such gatherings as retreats, the priests' senate, or meetings within the religious community. Conversation, which is at the heart of intimacy, is left at the level of "safe" topics and superficialities.

Sharing work provides an opening for “shoulder-to-shoulder” intimacy. With more emphasis given to individual gifts and ministries, however, and with an overall loss of personnel, religious communities have lost many of their traditional corporate ministries. Gone, or greatly diminished, is the sense of working together in “our” school, retreat center, or the like. Parish priests, many of whom now live alone, have also lost the opportunity to work intimately with colleagues.

On the positive side, one’s ministerial work does open up opportunities for developing intimate relationships with other persons. And intimacy of the shoulder-to-shoulder variety may also be engendered through work on community projects that are unrelated to one’s specific ministry. Diocesan clergy may also make use of opportunities for sharing with peers by participating in activities that transcend parish boundaries.

Sharing feelings invites “face-to-face” intimacy, yet, as noted earlier, our society does a very poor job of equipping men to develop skills in this area. In light of these deficits, some men will attempt to achieve intimacy without going through the process of identifying their feelings, developing skill in expressing their feelings, and listening to the other in return. Instead, they engage in and demand “mind reading,” thinking that they understand the other person and expecting to be understood in return. While sensitivity to nonverbal cues certainly can enhance communication, it is insufficient if one is attempting to engage in an intimate relationship. Engaging in mind reading or relying exclusively on nonverbal communication leads to erroneous deductions, for it is possible to “know” only a fraction of another’s thoughts or feelings. Over time, failures of self-revelation, coupled with the demand that the other “know” what is needed or expected in response to unstated thoughts or feelings, lead to misunderstandings and frustration that frequently result in the termination of the relationship.

Intimacy also requires that a high level of trust be established and maintained. The experience of having one’s confidences betrayed has caused many persons to limit their relationships to more superficial levels of engagement. Although women have been more frequently perceived as gossips, men are equally guilty of this vice. The lack of discretion and restraint evidenced by the carrying of tales from one community or parish setting to another has deterred many persons from sharing with colleagues or members of their religious community. Rather than run the risk of having sensitive material repeated to others, particularly when the material is likely to be portrayed in a one-sided manner or taken out of context, peo-

ple choose to protect themselves behind a wall of silence.

Showing respect for relational boundaries and the confidentiality of privileged communication would certainly nurture the creation of a “safe environment,” which is essential if intimate sharing is to occur. Respect and restraint are all the more necessary if intimate sharing is to occur in a group or community setting. It may be very tempting to confide in a friend who is outside the setting, especially if the item is “juicy” or if the person involved is not high on one’s list of friends. Such behavior, however, is unethical and, once discovered, will probably cause all group members to confront their sense of vulnerability and reevaluate their commitment to promoting intimate sharing within the group setting.

## DYSFUNCTIONS IMPAIR INTIMACY

In addition to the various impediments noted above, the presence of traits associated with a variety of personality disorders also impairs a person’s capacity to establish and maintain intimate relationships. For example, individuals who are preoccupied with unjustified doubts about the loyalty or trustworthiness of their friends or who perceive others as exploiting or deceiving them may be reluctant to confide in others. Some persons may display a pattern of detachment from social relationships, neither desiring nor enjoying close relationships and almost always choosing solitary activities. At times, excessive social anxiety that does not diminish with familiarity interferes with the formation of intimate relationships, as the person is unwilling to get involved with others unless certain of being liked. Fears of being shamed, ridiculed, criticized, or rejected in a social situation often inclines an excessively anxious person to keep others at arm’s length. In contrast, those experiencing fear of abandonment or those who feel unable to care for themselves when alone make such frantic efforts to cling to others that people are inclined to back away, legitimately fearing they will be engulfed by the person’s exaggerated needs.

A person’s capacity for intimacy may also be impaired by the presence of narcissistic traits, which foster a sense of oneself as “special” and, as a result, able to be understood only by other “special” or high-status people. Excessive narcissism also breeds a sense of entitlement—an unreasonable expectation that one is owed especially favorable treatment or automatic compliance with one’s demands. Such a person lacks empathy and is unwilling to recognize or identify with the feelings or needs of others. At times the narcissistic person may be interpersonally exploitative, taking advantage of other people in order



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## The ability to enter into an intimate relationship demands that we first act appropriately toward ourselves

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to achieve his or her personal goals and ends. In addition, some people tend to equate intimacy with acceptance of behavior that is actually unacceptable. For example, expecting others to be tolerant of frequent angry outbursts or other negative behaviors in the name of intimacy is to misconstrue the demands of genuine relationship and to seek approval for what is more correctly termed abuse. Expressions of negative feelings always need to be balanced by the virtue of restraint—the pause that allows us the opportunity to protect ourselves and others from actions and reactions that would be better left unexpressed.

### ATTAINING INTIMACY

With so many impediments, societal and personal, that make it difficult to establish intimate relationships, what steps might be taken to assist in meeting the need for intimacy?

Development of empathic understanding is vital if one wishes to nurture an intimate relationship. This involves learning to look at and to listen to another in a way that communicates acceptance, and being able to allow the other person's view to be the focus of attention. Fear of criticism and lack of acceptance often encourage people to hide their thoughts and feelings rather than to share them with each other. Learning to look and to listen in a way that nurtures intimacy requires transformation of our usual ways of dealing with others. We are asked to adopt a contemplative gaze—a way of looking at or studying another that is characterized by loving care. Our efforts to hear another require that we offer our full attention, noting nuances and shades of tone and

meaning. It can be painful, when one speaks of something that is highly significant, to have the meaning ignored, made light of, or misinterpreted by the other person. Developing the virtue of awareness or mindfulness allows us to come to appreciate the other person as a separate and unique individual and to savor the complexity of even the most ordinary life.

Approaching others from a stance of empathic understanding requires that we strive to set aside our ego-dominated needs and accept the other person as equal to ourselves in importance. At least for a time, we must make the effort to lay aside our own worldview and values in order to enter the world of the other without prejudice. Yielding to the temptation to remake a person in our own "image and likeness" destroys the potential of intimacy. When dealing at an intimate level with others, we need to "take off our shoes," mindful that we stand on holy ground. Freeing ourselves from the will to dominate is an enormous task, for we can never completely overcome our subjective biases or remove our projections from others. We can, however, strive to be more conscious of them so that they interfere less with our relationships. In seeking to enhance our capacity for intimacy, we might be guided by Jungian analyst Helen Luke, author of *The Way of Women*, who noted that denying the other person autonomy leads only to a "mix-up in the unconscious of two people." Separation, valuing the uniqueness of the other, is required prior to union because "uniting means two unique things that meet. Not two fuzzy things that merge."

Growth in intimacy also requires that we take a stance and declare ourselves when the other's needs are projected onto us. Acceptance of another is not to be equated with passivity, resignation, or a lack of necessary action on our part. The ability to enter into an intimate relationship demands that we first act appropriately toward ourselves. To fail to maintain appropriate boundaries in a relationship is to acquiesce to enmeshment and loss of our true selves. Long ago, the poet Rainer Maria Rilke insightfully observed that the point of intimate relationship is not to create a "quick commonality" by tearing down all boundaries. Instead, each partner is to guard the other's solitude, and thus they show each other the greatest possible trust.

Once an intimate relationship is established, it will continue to thrive and grow only when the partners are able to bring to the relationship such qualities as creative fidelity and merciful forgiveness. As Ben Sirach tells us, faithful friends are a sturdy shelter and lifesaving medicine (6:14,16). Fidelity to another is grounded in and builds on the integrity with which we live our lives. Accepting our own wholeness, both the dark and the light, we are able to offer our part-

ners in relationship the gifts of patience, tolerance, and understanding, which promote fidelity. Despite good intentions, however, we frequently fail in our relationships, hurting those we would least wish to harm and being injured by them in return. As we develop the gifts of self-knowledge, humility, and humor, we are better able to offer to self and others the gift of merciful forgiveness. Suffering along the road to forgiveness opens us to the mystery of life itself while nurturing within us compassion, fortitude, perseverance, and wisdom.

Establishing and maintaining intimate relationships requires discipline and transformation at every level of our beings. Yet if we are faithful to the work of relationship, we develop an increased desire to give to others while allowing ourselves to receive what is sheer gift. The capacity for intimacy springs not from inner emptiness but from mutual sharing, which in turn stimulates the desire and capacity for still greater sharing. And in the end, such sharing leads us to appreciate the invitation to intimacy with God, whose steadfast love is as high as the heavens

and whose faithfulness extends to the clouds (Psalm 57:10).

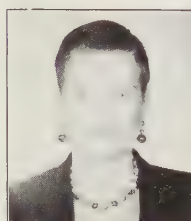
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*For more information, please see the back cover of this issue*



# Priestly Spirituality, Intimacy, and Health

*Reverend Kevin J. Feeney*

## True Happiness

Happy are those who do not follow  
The counsel of the wicked  
Nor go the way of sinners,  
Nor sit in company with scoffers.  
Rather, the law of the Lord is their joy;  
They are like a tree  
Planted near streams of water,  
That yields its fruit in due season;  
Its leaves never wither;  
Whatever they do prospers.

*(Psalm 1)*

**A**s I write this article, serious digging is going on nearby to repair damage to an underground water pipe on our campus. It seems that one of the majestic pines that grace the seminary grounds has sent its roots deep into one of the pipes that serve our buildings and has succeeded in blocking it. The tree is looking for water, as are we.

Psalm 1 sings of the happiness that comes from a life-giving relationship with God. We long for such a

relationship, which itself is mediated by “the law of the Lord.” It is there—in the very law of God, written now not on tablets of stone but on fragile hearts of flesh—that wise men and women root their lives. Drawing from those depths, people find that their lives bud forth into effective action. Being law-abiding and living good, moral lives is a source of happiness, but that is not enough. For the Christian, Jesus Christ is the *new* law—indeed, “the way, the truth, and the life.” In Jesus, God became human so that we could share God’s own life. Certainly, one of the things that the incarnation means is that God is to be found in our human condition and that we would do well to pay attention to whatever is human as a potentially revelatory locus. The law of the Lord Jesus Christ is now written on our hearts, but our faithfulness to that law tends to be, shall we say, inconsistent at best. Conversion is the process of becoming truly human and finding our lives patterned after, and somehow magnifying, the Lord.

After the shattering events of September 11, we may well be ambivalent about what it means to be truly human. Are we in danger of losing our humanity? Under threat—or, for that matter, under the daily stresses of life—do we somehow become less than human? Is the “good life” being placed in jeopardy? Are we being asked to question what we believe to *be* the

good life? Is the “good life,” as it is presented in our cultural context, congruent with the good life of a community rooted in the law of the Lord? We draw reassurances from wonderfully generous and compassionate responses to the needs that have arisen in recent months, both here and overseas. But we remain shaken and anxious and need to reassert goodness and virtue as marks of true humanity.

## TAKING HEART

Recall the Tin Man in *The Wizard of Oz*: here is the woodsman, the worker, whose strength is neutralized by what he believes is the lack of a heart. He is stiff, rusty, and lonely. His “salvation,” if you will, arrives through Dorothy when she comes into his life, bearing an oilcan. She anoints the Tin Man so that he can resume his search for a heart. We who watch the story discover with him that he always had a heart but that he needed a healing and freeing relationship to be able to discover that truth. We may also realize that he is us. The worker might represent the task-oriented priest who, because he has a big heart (but doesn’t use it enough to love himself), gives himself to every request that comes down the line. In parish life, there is no limit to need. There is no shortage of people making suggestions as to what the priorities should be and what the priest should do. Often lacking, however, are imagination, an ample work group, and the ability to work smart as well as to work hard. Because the priest is only human, he may find himself losing heart. In trying to be the dutiful worker for the Lord, the priest finds that all he has is his work. If he ever knew it, he forgets that it is *God’s* work and that he is a co-laborer. Physical or emotional illness may not be far behind.

Good human relationships (with family, friends, colleagues, a spiritual director), coupled with a life-giving relationship with God in prayer, can help the priest take heart. Ah, but here’s the difficulty: many of us are so busy, attending to multiple responsibilities and even multiple parishes, that we do not take time for either prayer or relationships. Too many of us do not have a spiritual director or prayer group. Days off, retreats, and vacations are deferred. We may end up seeking physical and emotional consolation and false intimacy by engaging in cybersex, the newest addiction affecting the priest population.

There is another extreme, of course, although probably a road less taken: we can tend toward the posture of too much self-care. This too is harmful, in that one can “rust out” rather than burn out and thus not be available for life-giving personal or ministerial relationships. We can listen to the well-meaning voices that tell us, “You’re working too hard. Take care of

yourself.” As human beings, we have legitimate needs that must be met (cf. Maslow’s hierarchy of needs). But, truth be told, we can go overboard in anxiously making sure that we take care of those needs. It is not going too far to say that inordinate self-care is one of the contributing factors to the unjust distribution of the world’s goods. Anxious self-concern (a.k.a. lack of trust in divine providence) can make us forgetful of the law written in our hearts: true meaning and true happiness are found in loving not only ourselves but also God and neighbor.

## MAKING TIME

A friend of mine shared something with me recently. I asked his permission to pass it along. He told me that he always had a problem relating to Christ. Christ seemed to him a great teacher like other great teachers, but there was a “past tense” quality to Jesus. He seemed remote, far away, abstract. Jesus was past, not present. It was hard for my friend to relate to those who expressed their love for Jesus or those who asked him if he “knew” the Lord Jesus. Then, on a recent retreat, he had the sense of Jesus speaking to him: “So you want to know me, do you? Try spending time with me.” My friend was startled at the clarity of the message but still wondered what it meant. As he stayed with the message in prayer, he said that he began to see that there were really multiple presences of Jesus: in scripture, in the sacraments, in his own inner life, and in other people. It was this latter realization—*Jesus Christ is in other people*—that dawned on him in a fresh and powerful way. Jesus is incarnate. Jesus is alive and well and living in the neighborhood. For so many years he had heard that message, but now, in his forties, he finally experienced its truth. One of the ways that he could intentionally seek the Lord was to seek him in other people—whether in family, friends, colleagues, or those to whom he ministered.

In the light of this realization, time becomes a precious gift at the service of relationship. A consciously relational approach to ministry (as opposed to a merely functional approach) would be that in which we come to look upon experiences as not merely draining our energy and robbing us of time, but as a way that Christ and the people are trying to give our roots water, anoint our fevered brow—in other words, give us life. In one of my parish assignments, I had a chance encounter with an elderly woman of the parish. At times, when I would see her coming, my first impulse was to look for an escape route; she tended to talk on and on. But she had me cornered (again) and proceeded to launch into conversation: “Father, I want to talk to you because you have Christ in you.”



My response was: "But Maria, you have Christ in you, too." (Was I saying: "So talk to Him, don't bother me?")

Not to be denied, she came back with: "I know *that*. I want the Christ in you to talk to the Christ in me."

Ouch. I'll never forget that encounter. Nor will I forget the fact that if I had found an escape route, I never would have received that grace. Each of us could give a myriad of such stories. Life-giving grace comes to us often unbidden, and not infrequently in distressing disguise. As we accumulate and share such experiences, as we pray about them and give thanks for them, we begin to seek them out more, or at least to trust that there's more where they came from. Clearly, I am not saying that every relationship and every ministerial experience is life-giving. If that were the case, there would be no divorce for married couples, no painful decisions to change assignments for priests and others in ministry. Discernment is needed. The main message here is that even with the painful experiences, even with those that seem death-dealing rather than life-giving, God will provide. We are asked to trust.

We work hard, and so we should. The people deserve our best. There is even a certain urgency (tempered with trust and peace) that should mark our ministry. After all, there is a great deal at stake. In the face of the demands of our ministry, we know that we have to be decisive about making time for prayer and relationships with others. Yet there are those among us who remind us that time is *for* relationship. The recent national tragedy has awakened many to the realization that life is both fleeting and fragile. People have a greater sense of urgency: *now* is the time to show that we love one another. What is more, we should not ignore work's potential to be an act of intimacy. Insofar as work can be a true expression of who we are as priests, and insofar as our work is received by people, it can truly be an act of intimacy. We can listen and give counsel in love. We can prepare homilies, articles, and classes in love. We can visit the sick and help the poor, all in love. It is not enough to talk of Love; we have to show Love. In so doing, we become more human, since human beings are made in the image and likeness of Love. We not only discover our heart; we exercise it for the good of others. It must be emphasized that we are not our work, but we can express ourselves through our work. Each time we offer bread and wine, we offer ourselves, our work, and that of the people gathered. With each act of love, be it in liturgy, in ministry, or in personal relationship, our roots sink deeper into the life-giving river that is grace. Greater attention on our part to the words and gestures of the liturgy can increase our ex-

perience of intimacy there. We more readily connect with the people in the Spirit. Personal and ministerial relationships can be draining, as can the repetitive celebration of the liturgy and the sacraments. But a certain attentiveness to the people, the words, the gestures, the environment, and one's personal prayer, set on the sure foundation of divine providence, can shake loose the cobwebs, awaken expectations, and bring a new vitality to words that have lost their luster and gestures that have become automatic.

## IDENTIFYING METAPHORS

We do well to discern the counsel of the wicked and not go where they would lead us. At times the counsel is clearly coming from outside. When we uncritically absorb the values and viewpoints of the day without putting them under the scrutiny of the gospel and the tradition, we become what we consume. We find it more difficult to speak for and live according to the gospel, which must remain free of all cultures even as it seeks to root itself in them. But there are other times when the counsel of the wicked is that of the famous "inner tapes" we all have—which, when left to their own designs, can dominate our thoughts, moods, and actions. For example, "I'm no good" is a well-worn recorded message that many have adopted, even though they may not be conscious of it. A poor self-image cripples our efforts in work and relationship and can send us looking for such compensations as power, prestige, pleasure, and wealth, to name just a few. Such an inner voice can drive us to overwork or other addictive behavior. Given free reign, it can drive us to depression and despair. If that is the case with us, what can we do about it? John Winjaards, in an article entitled "See Yourself in the Bible" (*Tablet*, 12/27/97), offers an interesting insight:

Francis of Assisi called himself God's fool, dancing in God's beautiful creation. Ignatius of Loyola on the other hand saw himself more as a loyal courtier, a disciplined soldier serving the king of kings. Our self-image is a pattern of metaphors knotted together by emotion.

Each of us has a unique web of mental pictures through which we interpret ourselves and the world around us. Whether we are aware of it or not, they provide us with the framework within which we think and act. They are also the scaffolding on which our spiritual life is built.

For that life to be healthy, our self-image has to be healthy.

To relate a healthy spiritual life to healthy self-image is nothing particularly new. However, I do find very interesting Winjaards's idea of the importance of metaphor in defining and potentially redefining self-

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## For all of us, the way to the “good life” is the way of conversion, the development of new habits in faith to replace the old ones

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image. To identify the alienating metaphors that are operative in our lives can be a first step on the road to life. To replace or rework them with metaphors based in scripture and our spiritual tradition (e.g., daughter, son, member of the Body, tree planted by the water, a heart of flesh upon which is written God's law of love) can be another step. This is not an artificial and arbitrary replacement of one metaphor with another but rather one that is accompanied by life-changing experiences (e.g., being loved, being forgiven, sensing that one is part of the whole, being provided for, having something to give back to life, being grateful). It does help, however, to occasionally take a critical look at those things (the “tapes,” metaphors, counsels) that undermine our ability to accept and live God's great gift of life, to ask God's help with them, and to engage in ways of living that will contribute to their transformation.

Christian spirituality is “life in the Spirit” of God. It is launched on the dangerous waters of baptism and takes one on a journey with the One who suffered, died, and rose for us. Christian spirituality is marked by ongoing conversion in this Paschal direction of conformity to Christ. Change is necessary. An intentional approach to this change can include our efforts to name the blocks to this new life, as well as to be attentive toward and to appropriate the helps that are provided along the way. If a growing spirituality is marked by ever-deepening intimacy (authentic relationship) with God, others, and self, then it is necessary to both name the blocks to intimacy—oftentimes related to traumatic experiences in life or other negative factors present in a person's history—

and to actively seek helps toward growth. If spiritual, psychological, and physical health are interrelated in some way in the human person, then we do well to attend to the healthy kinds of living that promote relationship and ministry.

As I try to put a finger on some of the negative dynamics in my life, here's a metaphor that I stumble across: I have a plant in my room that I regularly neglect (at least I am consistent). Usually, I walk by the plant without even noticing it. Then one day it catches my attention (maybe I can hear it screaming). It is drooping badly. To my alarm, I realize that I have not given it water for a number of days. I wonder if it is past the point of no return. So I douse it with water and hope that I have acted in time. Being a forgiving and hearty plant, it revives in a matter of hours. I heave a sigh of relief and then promptly proceed to neglect it again. What's wrong with this picture? What's wrong with this pattern?

In a similar way, I neglect my daily personal prayer and wonder at the flagging vitality of my relationship with God. I neglect or deny my emotions and wonder why I feel depressed or irritable. I neglect my diet and wonder why I don't recognize the man in the mirror. I neglect regular physical exercise or work and wonder why I feel so sluggish and stressed. I neglect reading and wonder why my homilies, conversations, and even my prayers seem to be tired reprises. I turn a blind eye and a deaf ear to beauty and find that I have forgotten how to praise. I neglect my family and friends and wonder why I feel so alone. I do not carefully listen to the person right in front of me because I am worrying upon the next person I have to see or the next task I have to do, and then I wonder why I am not finding ministry satisfying. In general, I let unhealthy patterns develop until enough pain sets in to motivate me to change. To turn to the metaphor of the neglected plant, I need to develop habits of attentiveness that would demand a regular checking of the soil and a regular regimen of wintering and feeding. My life is right there in front of me every day. I have to get into the habit of attending to it, or else there will be nothing to give away, or I will think that there is nothing worth giving away. For all of us, the way to the “good life” is the way of conversion, the development of new habits in faith to replace the old ones. We are in this for the long haul.

### PROGRESS AND CONCERNS

From my perspective as a member of a seminary faculty, there are a number of positive developments in regard to cultivating a spirituality that promotes intimacy and healthy living, as well as a number of concerns. First of all, spirituality is taken seriously.



Young people in particular are hungering for a sense of the transcendent. In this vein, there is a renewed interest in the devotional life, which often takes a traditional form, and does seek a felt sense of the presence of God and a real relationship with Jesus and Mary.

There is an ambivalent development, I think, in the current suspicion regarding the contribution that the human sciences, particularly psychology, can make in the human and spiritual development of the person. While it is good to note the limits of science and even to seek an eventual Christian understanding of the same, it would be a mistake to ignore the important insights and therapeutic value they can and do offer when integrated with a solid Christian spirituality. My concern with my generation was that we gave almost dogmatic authority to the sciences. My concern with people of the present generation is that in the search for the transcendent, they will neglect the immanent, try to shortcut the human journey, and not avail themselves of the helps that the human sciences, even with their limits, can provide for that journey.

To name another positive development, today there is more talk about celibacy, its positive values, its real challenges, and practical ways to live it. There is a humbler, more realistic approach to sexuality in general. But the special formational needs of and issues for homosexual candidates for the priesthood, although talked about with greater openness, have not been satisfactorily addressed.

Values such as priestly fraternity and diocesan identity are held up as antidotes to the growing isolation we see in our presbyterates. To live out these values in certain settings is a special challenge when distance places real limits on regular contact. Also promoted in today's seminary is the need to develop positive working relationships with deacons, lay ecclesial ministers, parish volunteers, and the laity in general. The importance of attending to one's physical needs in terms of diet, rest, and exercise is em-

phasized too. But there is certainly room for improvement in all these areas. Seminary formation attempts to promote growth in the human, spiritual, intellectual, and pastoral dimensions of the candidate's life, but more than that, it encourages a commitment to ongoing growth once a person is ordained.

What is the "good life" for a priest? The good life is just that: a life. It has sunk its roots deeply into the incarnate God. Jesus has shown us that we come from God and that we are to return to God. The good life is a moral life. It is a life marked by responsible, loving relationship with God, others, and self. Out of the foundational relationship with God, we see in new ways, we decide in new ways, and we act in new ways that are more and more consistent with our identity as the beloved of God. The good life produces a rich variety of emotions: laughter with those who laugh, sorrow with those who weep, anger at injustice, and the ability to channel that anger into loving action for change. All these are capacities that mark the good life. It is a life that respects basic physical and emotional needs, limits, and potentials for oneself and for all. The good life, because it is powerful and magnanimous, is generative of life in others. It is a life that expresses God's goodness, power, beauty, and self-giving love through work. The good life, for a Christian, is a human life ennobled by ever-deepening relationship with Christ and with others. Our roots, enlivened by grace, stretch and strive together for this life. The water is deep, frightening, and inviting.



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# Intimacy in Priests' Support Groups

*Reverend David Kiefer*

**F**or me, the fourth Tuesday of each month is support group day, and it has been for almost 27 years. The group consists of a half dozen priests now; there have been as many as nine in the past. We gather to share our joys and sorrows, our successes and failures, our satisfactions and disappointments. We take time to be present with one another and share the secrets of our lives. We explore life and the church that is so integral to our lives.

Our May 2001 meeting here in Green Bay, Wisconsin, was especially poignant, because we had buried Monsignor Carl Steiner, one of our members, just weeks before. Eighteen months earlier, another member, Father Bill Zimmer, had gone home to the Lord. These men were special gifts and blessings to all of us in the support group. With them we shared so much of our lives.

At times our coming together was not all that enriching. At times I wondered why I continued to participate. But then would come moments of grace, a deep hurt revealed, a brokenness seeking wholeness, a sigh of compassion, and it was all worthwhile. Rebirth happens again and again in sparks of new life and deeper friendship. What a gift to be a participant in these seasons of grace.

My first experience of support groups was in 1974, when Father Vince Dwyer of the Center for Human

Development came to our diocese to present his vision of priesthood and spirituality. His ministry has had an enduring impact on me, on the priests of our diocese, and on many priests throughout the world. Father Dwyer emphasized the great gospel message of God's love for us and how that love is grounded in proper self-love and love of one's neighbor. He shared the wisdom of the spiritual masters, and he did so with humor and humility.

A major resource for him was a 1973 document from the National Conference of Catholic Bishops, *The Spiritual Renewal of the American Priesthood*. The document states that "as a general rule both psychological and spiritual growth occur best in the atmosphere of a loving community where warm human relationships with one's peers and those in authority manifest a certain fullness of life." In his presentations, Father Dwyer focused on the themes of friendship, dialogue, affirmation, and a lifestyle that balances the spiritual, intellectual, physical, and emotional components of life. His was an integral, holistic vision that support groups were encouraged to adopt.

One of the goals of his Ministry to Priests Program was to set up support groups among priests. These support groups, as well as other priestly movements of growth, such as the Jesu Caritas Fraternity and



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Emmaus, sought to achieve a comfort level in “sharing the secrets of one’s heart.” Appropriate self-disclosure and revelation help one to deal with the isolation and loneliness that can be devastating to the celibate life. By walking with others in confidence and trust, priests come to experience more intimately the paschal mystery.

Support groups have assisted greatly in the development and growth of many priests. As a result, the entire presbyterate of the United States has benefited, as well as the people. These support groups have been a forum in which life issues involving work, leisure, prayer, friendships, and spiritual development can be addressed. I have personally benefited from these discussions. Other priests have also indicated that support groups have been effective both in their personal growth and in their ministerial activities.

#### **INSIGHT, BONDING, AND RENEWAL**

The purpose of support groups is to provide experience-based learning for the priests in developing more interpersonal competence. The individual can

explore in a relatively safe and supportive environment how much he can be his true self with others. To accomplish this, in the initial years of our support group, we contracted with a facilitator who helped us with our communication skills, the management of conflict, and our own insight into ourselves.

The stuff of our meetings was the stuff of our own lives—disagreements with coworkers and parishioners, new ways of being priests, learning experiences and seminars attended, friendships gained and lost, family sorrows and conflicts, pastoral successes and failures, spiritual crises, anger and chagrin with authority, and an increasing sense of the decline in candidates for the priesthood.

We related and discussed the hard aspects of pastoring, including handling conflicts within our feelings. Things like a 5:00 a.m. call from the police on Easter Sunday to console a mother whose son has just committed suicide result in heaviness of heart during the alleluia proclamation for the rest of the morning. The conflicting emotions occur again as one sits with parents who must deal with their baby being stillborn on Christmas day. All this is the stuff of a support group, binding us together in an intimacy of sharing, caring, death, and resurrection.

It was understood early on that God was part of our gathering: “Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in the midst of them” (Matt. 18:20). Prayer was made part of this process, to ensure that the horizontal dimensions of life would be meaningful in terms of a transcendent God who stands outside, as well as in the midst of, our lives. So many times, through the years, moments of grace flooded our group with the realization of God’s presence. There was no other explanation. At other times we were too petty and self-absorbed to understand God’s insertion into our lives.

Sometimes our discussions were almost entirely negative. We unloaded our frustrations about Rome, the bishop, diocesan mailings and demands, and the insensitivity of people. We were filled up by the plight of the poor pastor. The end of the day brought closure to all that with a meal and time to share light moments and stories. It was a time of friendship; it put a glow on the day that all the complaining and crud of the earlier exchange could not tarnish.

This is the message of the paschal mystery: We live with innumerable deaths—tiny deaths and terrible ones. There are dark nights and long, harsh winters. Our lives are also filled with births, new beginnings, grand conversions, wonderful resurrections. Each dark night is followed by an expanding dawn and a new day. Each long, hard, cold winter is followed by a spring that bursts forth into summer. Death leads to resurrection.

The support group is where we can unload the junk that accumulates. At the end of the day, it is the hour of friendship, the new dawn, the bursting forth of spring, a new start. We gather, we unburden ourselves, we gently bring our brokenness to one another, we tell our stories, we drink, we break bread, and we go forth—renewed by the communion of faith and hope that we have shared. It is a time of eucharist.

## FRIENDSHIP ESSENTIAL

It was through the telling of our stories that we became friends. In the 1970s we needed to reach out to each other. The excitement of the vision of Vatican II had led us into new territories in ministry. Now we needed friends to help us to assimilate that into our lives. Team ministry, parish pastoral councils, liturgical reforms, ecumenical relations, social advocacy groups, Cursillos, Christian Family Movement, Marriage Encounter—all exposed us to new relational models. Yet we felt pulled in so many directions. What was priesthood about?

The support groups, Jesu Caritas, and Einmaus brought priests into contact with each other. We told our stories to help each other understand what we were experiencing. The storytelling gradually opened us to deeper friendship with one another. We were able to unburden ourselves, to see the nods of understanding, to hear the words of affirmation and questioning in an atmosphere that did not call up our defenses. It was an atmosphere of friendship, a moment of grace.

Intimacy does not develop quickly or easily. It grows slowly as stories are shared. It deepens as the other is invited into the secret corners and hidden places of our lives. Slowly, our facades of perfection are pierced. Our guards come down, and efforts to impress others no longer govern. We are who we are, without masks, defenses, protections. A loyalty to each other develops. This loyalty expresses itself in support at times of sorrow, challenge, and failure. So often, the shared vulnerability to which we have exposed ourselves results in even greater bonding.

These qualities—shared life experience, vulnerability, mutual support, and loyalty—are the qualities of intimacy and friendship. Openness to intimacy with another does not come easily or at the same pace for everyone. It requires an environment of invitation that permits individuals to progress at their own pace, to unfold their lives according to their own timing. Dialogue begins in a guarded manner, but it gradually develops spontaneity, depending upon timing and the increasing ability to listen to one another's hearts.

## CHANGE LEADS TO GROWTH

A vital quality in one's journey toward intimacy or friendship is the ability to accept change in the form of growth as normal and natural. This is hard at times because change forces a person out of the comfortable and familiar. Yet a key task of each individual is to respond to life and to remove the barriers that obstruct its flow. Life is a river that constantly has blocks in it, but it flows in ways that remove those obstacles. Rivers, like life, can even remove the leaves and garbage that others throw in the stream.

Each person is responsible for his or her own growth by removing the blocks that crop up in life, even those put there by others. One's journey is an exercise of constant flow and interaction between the necessary reflection on the flow of life and the external flow itself, which reaches out to life.

Priests sometimes live a private life that is very different from their public life. While one needs a private life, it cannot be entirely secret; it needs to be shared with someone else. Support groups supply a degree of intimacy that ensures that at least one or two other people are included in the privacy of one's life. While we are each responsible for our own life and walk the path of life ourselves, it is good to have a friend along on the journey.

There is a constant danger, when one joins a support group, of losing sight of its importance. I have often wondered whether a given day's gathering would be worth the time and energy; so much could be done in the parish during that time. Time is precious in ministry, especially in these days of declining numbers of priests and the resulting time crunch. Yet the support group meeting is a privileged time when God speaks with us through the shared stories of one another. I try to hear the words of Jesus: "I shall not call you servants any more, because a servant does not know his master's business; I call you friends, because I have made known to you everything I have learned from my Father" (John 15:15).



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# A Psychological and Pastoral Response to Terrorism

*Len Sperry, M.D., Ph.D.*

**L**ately, our daily news, conversation, and personal thoughts are often focused on the threats or aftermath of terrorism. While round-the-clock news reporting on terrorism is intended to inform us, it can also unwittingly overwhelm and demoralize us. Anxiety and fear have touched us all; some of us feel immobilized by it. Our lives clearly have changed since September 11.

What accounts for this unprecedented assault on our collective psyche and spirit? How do we make sense of our fear of terrorism and our escalating anxiety about bioterrorist attacks? Why does the oft-quoted admonition to forgive and love one's enemies seem to provide little solace or guidance? This article describes a psychological and spiritual perspective for understanding terrorism and its wide-ranging impact on us. It then describes ways of responding psychologically and pastorally to this perplexing and troubling concern.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL PERSPECTIVE**

In large part, our lives are focused on three basic human needs: security, esteem and belonging, and control. Irrespective of our awareness of them, these needs significantly influence how we think, feel, and act. Obviously, our reactions and responses to terrorism and bioterrorism concern these needs.

The need for security involves our deeply felt desire, in the first year of life, to feel safe in any environment, particularly one that may be inhospitable or even hostile. Fearfulness is the response to situations that are perceived as dangerous or insecure. The anticipation that an event or situation may be dangerous and unsafe gives rise to anticipatory anxiety. Striving to earn money, taking out insurance policies, and amassing creature comforts are basically efforts to feel safe and secure.

The need for worthiness and belonging reflects our deeply felt desire to be accepted and to find a place of belonging in a family, peer group, and community. Feeling that we belong and are accepted by others establishes our self-validation and self-worth. Much of our motivation to achieve and succeed comes from our desire to reinforce and ensure the continuation of this sense of worthiness and belonging.

The need for control is our deeply felt desire to influence others to accomplish our will, whether directly or indirectly. Control and power can be positive when used to build up and develop others, negative when used to constrain or manipulate others.

## **PSYCHOLOGICAL FUNDAMENTALISM**

These three basic needs, operative in all human beings, are useful in explaining individual and group

behaviors, including those of terrorists and other “psychological fundamentalists”—unfulfilled and disenfranchised individuals who view themselves as weak and ineffectual and view the world as full of evil and uncertainty. Consequently, they seek goodness, certainty, and a feeling of powerfulness. While they may be highly educated, their adjustment to family and often to community life has been difficult and troubling. They tend to disdain authority figures whose values differ from theirs and idealize authority figures whose values are similar to theirs. Terrorists are psychological fundamentalists with a cause: if the cause is religious, they are “religious fundamentalists,” and if the cause is political, they are “true believers.” Religious fundamentalists typically believe that God is furious with the evil in the world and is about to end it all. They insist that they have been called to transform the world by ridding it of evil. Unfortunately, they believe that transformation can be accomplished only through violence.

## THE TERRORIST MIND

What explains the viciousness of those engaged in terrorist acts? Research on terrorism is still in its infancy. Nevertheless, some preliminary findings are noteworthy. Jerrold Post, M.D., and others have attempted to understand the mind of the terrorist through research based on an analysis of court records, memoirs, and interviews with terrorists. There is increasing consensus that terrorists seldom exhibit serious psychopathology. However, research also suggests that individuals attracted to terrorism share some common personality traits, defense mechanisms, and social history.

Several researchers have characterized terrorists as aggressive, action-oriented, excitement-seeking individuals. Terrorists are frightened, insecure people looking for answers and direction. They are searching for something to believe in that will give meaning and purpose to their lives. Involvement in a terrorist group gives them a strong sense of security and fulfills their search for a sense of worthiness. Being part of a terrorist group provides them, often for the first time in their lives, with a feeling of belonging, and the terrorist cause inspires a sense of engagement in something important and significant. Because they view themselves not as powerful and influential but as disenfranchised and disdained, terrorists-to-be are attracted to powerful, charismatic figures. They are only too willing to subordinate themselves to the will of such a leader in exchange for the opportunity to bask in that leader’s power and influence. Ironically, terrorists fulfill their needs for security, belonging, and control by making the rest of us feel insecure.

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In addition, their sense of self is damaged and fragmented. Consistent with self-fragmentation, these individuals employ the rather primitive defenses of splitting and projection. This is particularly true among leaders of terrorist groups. Interestingly, these same defenses provide a high degree of uniformity to their belief system and rhetorical style.

Splitting is an unconscious defense mechanism that is operative when individuals are unable to adequately integrate the good and bad parts or aspects of the self. To cope with the scary feelings associated with badness and to achieve some sense of cohesion of the personality, bad parts of the self are “split off” from the “me” and projected onto the “not-me” or “other.”

Rather than accept that any of their bad thoughts, feelings, and actions could possibly be “me,” these individuals blame their feelings (rage, resentment, hatred), thoughts (sense of being weak and ineffectual), and actions (terrorism) on others. This mechanism permits individuals to maintain the belief that they are good and worthwhile whereas others are bad and evil. Unable to face their own inadequacies, these individuals require an external enemy to blame and attack. In other words, terrorists believe that the problem is not their own, but rather caused by others. This, of course, is us-versus-them thinking. The belief that others have caused all their problems provides



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## Increasing evidence suggests that many terrorists have not experienced success in their personal, family, educational, or work lives

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terrorists with a convenient explanation for what has gone wrong in life, as well as a ready justification for any acting out and violence they might perpetrate.

The persistence of splitting has significant repercussions for the individual. Normal personality development involves the integration of the various good/bad, either/or, and black/white splits in life. Because self and others are a mixture of good and bad, inclusiveness and both/and thinking are useful, and there are many shades of gray in life. But individuals with damaged, fragmented selves can only compartmentalize reality and project negativity outward. They deny negative feelings access to positive states, which could temper the negative state. This negativity greatly increases the likelihood of destroying the good when it is unleashed. In short, splitting can be thought of as an unconscious deception that conceals negative aspects of the self from the personality, which must be externalized in order to maintain some sense of self-cohesion and meaning.

In addition, increasing evidence suggests that many terrorists have not experienced success in their personal, family, educational, or work lives. Because of their sense of inadequacy in the face of perceived danger and evil in the world and their lack of success, they are seeking something to believe in and in someone who will guide and direct their lives. Accordingly, they are most willing—and need—to subordinate their fragmented sense of self to a charismatic leader whom they view as powerful and able to provide them with a feeling of belonging, a sense of meaning in life, and something to

believe in that really matters. By definition, charismatic leaders provide followers with such a faith. Eric Hoffer, author of *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*, has noted that “faith in a holy cause is to a considerable extent a substitute for lost faith in ourselves.” By committing themselves to a charismatic leader, terrorists experience, often for the first time, a feeling of truly belonging and being needed—and, because of their commitment to an important cause, a sense of being successful and useful.

### RELIGIOUS AND SPIRITUAL PERSPECTIVE

Returning to the three basic needs, it is important to note that while they are usually understood from a psychological perspective, they also can be described from a spiritual perspective. Nevertheless, the spiritual and psychological perspectives of these three needs differ somewhat. From a spiritual perspective, the three needs are viewed in terms of spiritual transformation. Thus, true security is understood to be found in believing and experiencing the divine presence within one's self. In his book *Intimacy with God*, Abbot Thomas Keating indicates that letting go of our need for external security is a necessary condition for making progress on the spiritual journey. Similarly, true worthiness and belonging are to be found in accepting that one's basic goodness and worth have already been affirmed by God. Finally, true control is to be found in dying to one's false self and totally submitting one's will to God. Not surprisingly, this understanding is not shared by religious fundamentalists.

### RELIGIOUS FUNDAMENTALISM AND TERRORISM

The monotheistic religions of Christianity, Judaism, and Islam have a different view of good and evil than other world religions. For example, while Buddhism maintains that good and evil balance each other, the monotheistic religions emphasize the battle between good and evil. Religious fundamentalists in these religions, by reason of their psychological fundamentalist outlook, are predisposed to accentuate this conflict, viewing it as an absolute split between good and evil. They view themselves and those who share and practice their religious beliefs as good and saved, and those who do not as bad and damned. Furthermore, they believe they are doing God's will by spurning or eliminating infidels. They are not ambivalent about committing violence and murder; they perceive themselves as sanctioned by religious authority and acting in the name of God. In other words, when their defense mechanisms of



splitting and projection seem consistent with and reinforced by their religious beliefs, they feel totally justified in committing terrorist acts and anticipate that these deeds will be generously rewarded in the next life. Suicide bombings and other forms of martyrdom are revered as the the highest mark of faith and loyalty to their charismatic leader and to God.

Once these fundamentalists are caught up in the terrorist group's belief that the West is to blame for corrupting the Islamic world, they feel totally justified in striking out against the perceived evilness of the West, particularly as manifested in capitalism, democracy, and gender equality. For them, a return to the fundamentals of the Islamic way of life from the golden age of Islam (in the Middle Ages) is a moral imperative. In fact, it is the only moral imperative that makes sense to them. The Koran's tenets about mercy, tolerance, and charity get overridden by faith in an eternal holy war against the infidel West.

## PSYCHOLOGICAL RESPONSE

Clinical research findings indicate that security is of primary concern to most Americans. Accordingly, professional mental health associations have offered a set of general recommendations for dealing with the fear and insecurity associated with terrorism, including the following: Go about your life as normally as possible and limit exposure to the news media, as overexposure to news reporting can heighten anxiety. Talk about feelings with others by sharing your concerns, or take time out for yourself by walking or reading. Do the things you do well, in order to experience a sense of mastery and control. Educate yourself so you know more about terrorism. Strengthen yourself and reduce stress by exercising your body and mind. Use humor as a way to cope by watching a funny television show or movie or by reading a humorous book. Finally, if your stress and anxiety are not subsiding and you are unable to meet such daily responsibilities as going to work or caring for your family, seek professional help sooner rather than later. While these general recommendations may be reasonably helpful to some individuals, they will be discounted or largely ignored by most. In short, general recommendations tend to have limited impact because individuals may not have sufficient readiness or motivation to follow the recommended course of action. Certainly, they are no substitute for the advice provided by a psychotherapist and tailored to a particular individual's or group's needs and concerns. Effective psychotherapists can readily discern readiness for or resistance to change in individuals and groups and gear their interventions accordingly.

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**Homilies and pastoral advice that simply advocate forgiving and loving one's enemies, while theologically accurate, are not necessarily pastorally sound**

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## PASTORAL RESPONSE

A pastoral response is analogous to the psychotherapist's assessment of needs, processing of concerns, and tailoring of advice and recommendations. A theological response is analogous to providing the public with a general recommendation or admonition. A pastoral response is the application of a theological principle or admonition to a specific individual or faith community within a particular context. That means that in our current climate of fear and insecurity about terrorism, homilies and pastoral advice that simply advocate forgiving and loving one's enemies, while theologically accurate, are not necessarily pastorally sound. The impact of such general admonitions is likely to be limited. A few will take the advice to heart and change their attitudes and behaviors, but most will either ignore it or object to it (e.g., "How can you say that? This is a war, which our bishop says is a just war. These terrorists need to be taught a lesson first") and then ignore it. Only those who are sufficiently spiritually mature can adequately internalize this gospel advice, as they are more disposed to the security that is found in the experience of the divine presence within than to the security that comes from military actions, the stockpiling of antibiotics and gas masks, or the harboring of hateful and fearful thoughts about individuals of Middle Eastern descent.



On the other hand, a pastorally sound response is more likely to lead to follow-up questions or discussion, personal reflection, and soul searching, and may perhaps be an opening for grace and the beginning of a change of mind and heart. A pastorally sound response would first ascertain the individual's or community's immediate needs and concerns, as well as their general level of psychological and spiritual development and readiness for change or transformation. Second, it would understand and process the specific need(s) involved and respond in terms of the individual's or community's level of development and readiness for transformation.

For example, if insecurity is the dominant need of a specific individual or faith community, and if that individual or community is not particularly spiritually mature or emotionally ready to hear and accept the gospel message to love and forgive terrorists, the homily or pastoral conversation would begin at a different point. It would begin at the individual's or community's current level of readiness and slowly and steadily support, yet at the same time challenge, the individual or community to reach a higher level of readiness to accept the gospel dictum. It anticipates their fearful responses and objections and supports them in their anguish and anxiety, viewing these as part of the spiritual journey. It recognizes that American culture views security needs from a materialistic perspective, wherein external protection and resources are believed to buffer one from feelings of insecurity.

Because the challenge of growth is to move from the false security of externals (e.g., self-protection and retaliation) to true spiritual security, the focus is on the process of transformation and conversion—a change of heart and mind. Because it is a process, such a transformation ordinarily unfolds over time, and many of us are impatient in the face of such a process. Just as our military leaders caution that “we are in this for the long haul,” this spiritual process will be ongoing for many. Nevertheless, in times of great crisis, “transforming moments,” in which major shifts occur within very brief time frames, have been reported.

## CHALLENGE REQUIRES COMMITMENT

Everyone is motivated by the same basic needs—even terrorists. It appears that psychological and religious fundamentalism are operative in the terrorism the United States has recently experienced at the hands of Islamic terrorists. In addition to creating a political crisis, terrorism in America has also caused a spiritual crisis. Essentially, it is a crisis involving security. Homilists and other ministry personnel who can view this crisis as a call for deeper conversion and transformation, both in themselves and in those to whom they minister, can be instruments of immense spiritual growth. The challenge is formidable and, in most instances, will not be met with just a few homilies or pastoral conversations. Presumably, the call is from the Holy Spirit—and, inevitably, grace is already being poured out. Arguably, accepting this challenge requires a commitment to gaining a better understanding of the needs and readiness of each individual or faith community and then responding in the most psychologically and pastorally sound fashion.

## RECOMMENDED READING

- Hoffer, E. *The True Believer: Thoughts on the Nature of Mass Movements*. San Francisco, California: HarperCollins, 1989.
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# Invitation to Authors

**T**he principal intention of our editorial staff and board in publishing HUMAN DEVELOPMENT is to be of help to people involved in the work of fostering the growth of others. This growth, which is as important for the well-being of society as it is for that of individuals, cannot be achieved apart from beneficial interaction among persons; nor can it be accomplished without the grace of the Creator, who wants us all to live our lives as maturely as possible and who is glorified by our doing so. The articles we publish are written to contribute to the promotion of such constructive interaction among persons, and between them and God.

The intellectual, emotional, spiritual, moral, physical, sexual, and cultural aspects of human development are all of deep concern to us. It is our hope that writers who desire to contribute to the ministry this journal represents will feel encouraged to deal with any of these areas of growth, keeping in mind the fact that our readers include church leaders, pastoral ministers, educators, religious superiors, spiritual directors, athletic coaches, religious formation personnel, campus ministers, missionaries, people performing healing ministries, parents, women and men engaged in lay ministry, and other people of various religious denominations who have in their care persons of all ages whom they want to help develop to the fullest degree of maturity, happiness, and human effectiveness.

We want the articles we publish to be of interest to as many of these readers as possible. We want the content of the articles to shed theoretical light on the various aspects of human development. We also desire to provide as many how-to articles as we can, in which the authors describe for our readers what they have learned from both their successful and their unsuccessful attempts to nourish the growth of others. We are especially interested in presenting articles that discuss the ways that development-related issues and problems are handled and ministries are performed in diverse cultural settings around the world. We want to receive reviews of books and films; reports on research, workshops, symposia, and courses; interviews; and letters to our editor.

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